How He Grew

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How He Grew

by Onisius

Summary

Ed Graham loves his son above all other things. Where Will came from doesn’t matter, only that they are a family. Will's habit for trouble aside, their life is peaceful and happy. But as his son grows keeping him hidden from 'the powers that be' becomes more and more difficult. When protecting Will means leaving everything behind Ed is more than willing to. Even if it kills him.

The story where Will is learning about life, Jack is afraid, Bella is happy and Hannibal has finally found what he has been looking for all along.

Prologue

How He Grew

The Tales of Tarn: Part One

Prologue

August 7th 1985

Blue Cove, Delaware

It had been a cooler summer than normal and that night was not especially warm. But the sky was full of stars as they drove down a dark lane as part of a convoy. Jack peered up at them with mild interest.

“Orion’s belt.” he said upon spotting it. It was starting to sit lower in the sky and would eventually disappear from view as winter set in.

“A stargazer also?” asked his mentor Davis, from behind the wheel.

“No,” replied jack “not really, just something from when I was a kid, my best friend used to point them out to me. Never cared then… but now sometimes I look up and realize some of what he told me, stuck.”

The older man inclined his head “learning through osmosis… So, where’s your friend now?”

“New Orleans.”

“You guys still in touch?”

“Closest thing to a family I can remember having, we call each other most weekends. They just lost a child, so I’ve been calling most nights lately.”

“I’m sure he can go one night without you.” replied Davis.

Jack nodded “he’s a tough man, had to be…”

They fell back into silence as up ahead they could see the convoy slowing and entering a wooded area. They followed behind using the lights of the car in front to guide them.

“I know we've been working up to this operation for a long time, but why now? What aren't you telling me?” Jack asked, voicing the questions that had been stirring in his head for some time now, but had put aside hoping the other man would bring it up before they arrived, but

he hadn't. The older man glanced at his partner before looking back to the car in front of them that had slowed to a stop.

“When you start getting involved at this level the lines between organizations will start to blur.” Davis said eyes not leaving the road.

Jack frowned “Why do I get the feeling I'm in over my head? We don't have a warrant but I don't suppose we're going to let something like the law stop us.”

Davis laughed bitterly “we are not bound by the law we *are* the law, who exactly do you imagine is going to arrest us?”

Jack frowned but remained silent.

“If you want to put yourself in cuffs go ahead Crawford.” Davis added as they came around the corner and saw the chaos stretched out before them. A sprawling fortress stood upon an incline, overlooking a bay. It was surrounded by a few smaller buildings all made of stone. It appeared to Jack to be cold and imposing even surrounded as it was by swarms of people and lights.

Helicopters loomed in the sky shinning spotlights on the buildings and land surrounding it. Men in black combat clothes with large guns were leading lines of people out of buildings with black hoods over their heads.

“Thats a lot of people, are we going to have room for them all?” asked Jack as Davis pulled up to park in a row of black cars.

“Don’t worry about them. They didn't exist to begin with not with the bedfellows they keep.”

“Davis…”

“*Look Jack*, I've had you fast tracked because I thought you could *handle* it. I would hope by now you could have the same faith in me that I've put in you." Davis looked at Jack who remained stoic. "Here's the thing son, these people are in the way of our objective.”

“Which objective is that because it's certainly not upholding the law.” replied Jack.

Davis sighed tiredly “The only objective that matters Jackie boy, Protecting this great country. Want to make a difference, make one. Just don’t get so caught up in the bureaucratic rubbish, it gets people killed.”

“I see” Jack answers eyeing several men, clothed in black, leading a line of subdued and bloodied prisoners out in front of the building, where they are made to kneel in the grass.

Davis got out of the car “These people are the bad guys, not us. You'll see that soon enough for yourself.” he said and started to trudge upwards towards the entrance of the main building.

"If your inside man turns out to be the real deal" Jack said and followed Davis.

The air is filled with the fearful begging and cries of the prisoners who seem to know where this is going but are unable to do anything to stop the inevitable.

There was a deafening boom and then another and another as one by one the prisoners fall forward lifeless. The sound hurts, echoing off into the night as blood splattered in a fine crimson mist on the grass. Jack tried not to flinch with each death but failed, a dark fear welling up inside him.

Davis eyed him seriously “He's the real deal alright... are you ready?”

“As ready as I always am.” Jack replied, wiped the sweat from his hands while keeping determined pace with Davis.

Davis nodded “good, Lets go.”

By the time they are finished for the night Jack is existing in a sort of haze. He cradles the baby to his chest and carries it to the car. It is strangely silent, looking up at him with searching eyes. He keeps it in his arms as he sits in the passenger seat. He knows he should be feeling something, but he is numb.

Davis drops Jack of in the early hours of the morning. The air is crisp, and Jack pulled his jacket around the baby. He made his way inside and released a breath of relief when he can slouch into his chair in the kitchen. The baby seemed so small cradled in his arms. His wife stood before him still wrapped in her dressing gown. Having entered the kitchen, herself only moments before.

“Where did he come from?” Bella asked.

Jack shook his head and croaked, "Can’t say."

Bella inclined her head then took the baby from Jacks arms “he have a name?”

Jack shook his head.

The baby looked up at Bella with alert blue eyes and reached out his hand to grab hers.

She smiled “how could such a beautiful wee boy not have a name.” she whispered and sat down with him at the table next to Jack who still had not moved or spoken more than a few words.

“That bad ha?” she asked “well there’s nothing for it. If we are to have our guest stay, we’ll need some things. Get a paper and pen will you and I’ll give you a list of things to get. Might do you good having a task to focus on” then she looked back down at the baby a soft smile on her lips “I think I’ll call you Will.”

Chapter One: The Bear and the Boy

Chapter One

The Bear and the Boy

September 21st 1988

Approximately 30 Minutes outside Beaver, Alaska.

“Don’t touch that.” Ed Graham said in warning, as his three-and-a-half-year-old son reached out for the used fishing hook. Will looks up at his dad and backs away from the temptation. Ed nods at his son and continues to gut the fish he is working on.

“Good boy Will,” he murmurs “Nearly done then we’ll go home and cook this up in time for Uncle Jack and Auntie Bella arriving.” he glances up at Will who is watching him with wide blue eyes. “How does that sound?”

Will does not answer, nor does Ed expect him to.

“I reckon they’ll bring you something, always do.”

He finishes up with the fish and puts it on ice before cleaning his gear as best as he can in the river and packing up. He Turns back to check on Will and finds him standing a good distance from where he left him. his eyes which normally follow Ed's actions closely are instead turned to the tree line.

“All right there son?” he asks standing to his feet.

Will does not reply nor does he turn to look back at him, instead his gaze is focused, intent on something Ed has not even realized is there…. just out of view.

Suddenly Will is taking off towards the tree line, Ed rushes to catch up with him, which is not too difficult, even though his son is unusually nimble and coordinated for a child his age.

“Where are you going?” he asks patiently as he makes his way to stand beside Will, not grabbing him just yet as he looks around warily. He squints, trying to see what Will sees.

But in that moment and without hesitation the boy is gone, he flits over the rocks with ease and Ed rushes to keep up with him a moment after briefly peering over his shoulder where their gear waits, undisturbed by the trail.

He hears something, then, not too far off and with a wash of fear in his belly he rushes over and grabs a hold of Wills arm tightly. The hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

“Will, we need to head back now.” he says trying to not sound tense and failing. He thinks he can almost see it now, a glimpse of brown in amongst the trees. He knows suddenly what it is and swallows down any other thoughts or words. Instead, he begins to slowly drag Will back towards their gear. Will not seeming to understand the danger starts to struggle with his dad. Tugging and pulling against his grip with surprising strength.

“No!” Will growls out loudly, shocking Ed momentarily. But without anytime to pause he tries again to pull Will back towards their gear. But with an unusual amount of strength for a child his age, Will manages to wrench himself from his dad’s floundering hands.

In the same moment Ed sees a flash of movement, racing towards them. The bear is massive, brown with tawny fur on its burly body. It makes a huffing, angry noise, its mouth is partly open, and Ed can see its large teeth. Ed has only moments to decide what to do as he watches his wee boy rushing at the massive creature and tries to draw the danger to him instead. If only to give his son a chance, *any* chance at all.

“Over here you son of a bitch!” he screams, waving his arms and stomping his feet while moving towards the animal but he is not as nimble as Will, and he ends up stumbling over the rocky ground. By the time Ed had gotten back onto his feet the bear was Still, a great hulking being of muscle and fur heaving with each breath. With a hand clutching at his chest Ed saw that Will was only steps from it. Ed was frozen on the spot as the bear sat down heavily, allowing Will to approach it.

“Will!!” he calls out, his voice sounds weaker than he'd intended, strained, but he knows it is loud enough for his son to hear. But Will doesn’t turn around, shows no signs of hearing Ed at all.

With a shaky breath Ed approaches, cautiously, ready to get between his son and the bear if the need presented itself, ready to do *whatever* it took to give his boy a chance at life. A small part of Ed becomes fleetingly aware that all of his fear has left him, the shake he had in his hands has gone, the sickness in his stomach has been forgotten. Now, instead, Ed is left only with determination and a cold sort of peace.

Suddenly the bear shuffles backwards away from his son as it notices Ed again moving towards it. It lunges towards Ed at full speed, a growl pulling at its lips, it bares its teeth aggressively, but Ed can’t stop, not with Will still in danger. Then Ed looks on in horror as his son runs after the bear.

Will's quiet voice breaks the chilled silence. “No Dad! It's ok!” Ed looks on with wide unblinking eyes as the bear comes to a sudden halt and turns to look back at Will, Will shakes his head emphatically at it.

The bear glances back at Ed before turning to Will and walking back up to the boy. The bear then sits itself down inches to Will. Ed’s mouth goes slack, his bottom jaw open. Try as he might, he could not make sense of the sight of his three-year-old son reaching out and stroking the side of the bear's massive snout. The bear was being gentle in its movements, slow and careful. Bowing its head, it almost appeared to be deferring to his son. Ed had frozen, his body stiff and in shock, his mind empty of any coherent thought.

Will walks around the bear which by now has laid down, even like that it was taller than Will, an intimidating figure in the dusk. A Deep purr like noise found its way across to Ed, as Will runs his hands in the fur of its flanks then carefully leans into its side, resting his weight on it.

Ed holds himself together… but only just. He is completely helpless to save his son if anything happens to go wrong, next to the strength of such a creature he is nothing. He forces his legs to be still, lest he startles the animal into action. Ed takes several deep breaths in an attempt to calm himself and reaches out his arm. “Will?” he says gently “we need to go. Uncle Jack and Aunty Bella will be arriving any minute and they'll be worried if we’re not there.”

Will did not turn towards him or acknowledge he had heard him. He has his back to Ed as he begins pacing around the bear. Will pauses by its head and appears to whisper something to it.

“Will *please*…” Ed says, his voice tense.

Something in Ed’s voice gets Will's attention because he looks back at his father and smiles “coming!” he says as he gallops over to him.

The bear watch’s him go and gets back onto its feet. It looks for a moment as if it might follow but Will turns and waves good-bye to it. The creature appears appeased by that, and it turns and wanders back into the tree line away from the duo.

Ed picks up Will and grips him tightly to his chest. Then, with his heart still thundering in his chest he makes his way over rocks and stones, back to his truck.

When Ed pulls up at the house, Jack and Bella are sitting, waiting in a rental car. He pauses and takes a few breaths to calm himself.

Will, not concerned with the events of the day, takes off his seat-belt and leaps down from the truck and runs to his aunt, excited to see her.

She bends down and scoops him up. “How’s my little man?” she asks, a smile on her face. “Good I bet.” she says.

“Yup.” says Will and she swings her eyes to look at Ed with a crease in her forehead and a smile on her face.

Ed nods and heads to unlock the front door.

“When did that happen?” Jack asks and ruffle’s Wills hair.

“Today.” Ed mutters and goes back to the truck to start unloading their gear.

“You okay Ed?” Jack asks, Bella who is observing Ed has a small frown on her face “you’re looking quite pale.”

Ed just nods.

“Ah, Bella, my love… why don’t you take Will in, and I’ll help unpack?” Jack asks his wife.

Bella nods "sure thing" and carries Will in “Come on darling! let’s see what new drawings you’ve done since the last time I visited.”

Jack turns back to Ed “What's going on?” he asks.

“Let’s just get everything in.” Ed replies

“And then we’re going to talk.” Jack states.

Ed inclines his head “Then we can talk.”

“Good” Jack replies and does as he is directed by Ed to hurry the unpacking up.

Once everyone is inside and Will and Bella are in Wills room coloring together, Jack sits down at the counter to watch Ed work on dinner. Ed for now just stands there eyes unfocused.

“So?” Jack asks

“Will spoke” Ed reply's

“Knew he would eventually, kids clearly bright… maybe a little *too* bright.” Jack smiles, able to banish away the worries he’d secretly harbored.

Ed looks at him blankly.

“Soooooooo” Jack says, “what were his first words?”

“No.” says Ed with a small crinkle to his lips.

Jack chuckles with amusement “Good on Will” then he raises his eyebrows at Ed “need any help with dinner?”

Ed eyes the stool Jack is comfortably sitting on, “Come on Jack, we both know you can’t cook…” Ed turns back to the fish he is preparing, taking out his knife, he begins to remove the scales.

Jack watches Ed's hands work, more out of lack of anything else to do than interest, he had seen Ed do this many times before. “Just being polite.”

“Since when?” Ed says with a small smile.

“Since now apparently,” Jack shifts in his seat his eyes turning sharp “There *is* more isn’t there.”

Ed pauses for a second but then continues with the fish. “What gave it away?”

“Everything,” Supplies Jack “come now Ed, stop stalling and get to the point.”

“Like old times then,” huffs Ed “Will didn’t just say his first word today… He said his first *words*.”

Jack raises his eyebrows but doesn’t comment, waiting for more.

“He can say full sentences.”

“He's been holding out on us?” Jack asks.

Ed nods “Waiting for the right time maybe…. Something to draw the words out.”

“And what was the thing to draw them out?”

“A bear” Ed says.

“You going to supply me with some context?” Jack asks with a little irritation peering through his voice.

Ed gives Jack a sharp look “A grizzly bear… A big one came out of the trees when I was gutting the fish and putting them on ice. Never seen anything like it.” he shook his head still trying to understand what he had seen. “The great brute didn’t hurt a hair on Wills head, was gentle with him and….” He trails off and begins fileting the fish with skilled hands.

“And?” Jack prompted growing annoyed in his impatance.

“Maybe I was imagining it… But I don’t think I was…” Ed’s eyes are distant as if he is seeing something that isn’t there.

“*And?*” Jack said again his voice gaining in volume.

Ed looks down at his hands “you’ve known me a long time.”

Jack nods and moves his hands in a circular motion, erging Ed to get to the point.

“You’re my oldest friend and I like to think you’d know me better than anyone else.” Ed eyes him seriously, he refuses to acknowledge Jacks frustration with a quick answer, he needs him to believe him, to understand.

“Not much of a competition.” Jack comments teasingly.

Ed smiles at him warmly.

“But if you *don’t* get to the point soon, I might just shoot you myself” Jack says sarcastically.

"*Always* so impatient…"

"Always *wasting* my time!"

"True." Ed nods and allows himself to focus back on the fish.

"Annnnnnd……?" Jack raises a hand and swirls it in encouragement again.

Ed goes to the pantry and searches out some flour and salt before coming back "you ever known me to be unreliable?"

"*No*."

"Or to see things where there wasn't anything?"

"I'm starting to wonder…." Jack teases.

Ed frowns at him Jack stretches his arms out in surrender "no, you're one of the most levelheaded men I've ever known. You tend to see things exactly as they are."

Ed nods "right well...What I am going to tell you is going to sound strange."

"I got that; you've made yourself *very* clear and you know *I trust you!* But you're wearing my patience thin...."

Ed was covering the fish in the flour and salt while the pan heated up with butter melting next to him. "I think Will talked to that bear… and it listened."

Jack sits still in silent deep thought.

"The bear turned towards me, and it meant to harm me... That's what it looked like, then Will told it to stop, and it did." Ed began to wash his hands.

"I see," Jack says, "A grizzly bear and Will had a good chat and then off it went?"

Ed nods "That's the gist of it."

"Oh," says Jack "is that all!"

"No need to be sarcastic, I know it sounds crazy… But it happened."

"It defiantly sounds crazy." Jack nods his head "but you know what I *do* believe you."

Ed nods looking relieved "Thing let Will pet it… it liked him. Then at the end Will waved goodbye and the thing wandered off."

"Okay then… how about a drink?" Jack asks.

Ed goes to get a couple of beers from the fridge and then starts cooking the fish, it crackles in the pan pleasantly. "You believe me… didn't see that coming."

“Few things would surprise me anymore.” Jack replies and takes a sip of his drink.

Ed nods “seen some strange things yourself?”

Jack nods “You wouldn't believe the things I've seen, terrible and amazing, and every imaginable gradation of the both of them.”

“Care to tell?” Ed asks as he turns over the fish, the smell coming from the pan is glorious.

“Can’t.” Jack says with raised eyebrows "as well you know" is left unsaid for now.

“It to do with Will?” Ed asks.

Jack shifts in his seat “now I *know* you did not just *ask* me that! We’ve been *over* this countless times!”

“Right,” Ed says eyeing him “Can’t tell me.”

“Your right*, I can’t tell you*!” Jack yells

“And I was willing to accept that… Thought maybe you rescued him from a bad situation or felt responsible for him or something.” Ed's eyes are steel as he looks at Jack. “Then he wouldn’t talk, Kids three, still silent, not a word and I think to myself, kid might have challenges and I accept it because Will’s my son” Ed replies proudly, “I’ve had him a good three years now And I kept him when it was too much for Kate and she left me. I choose that boy over my own wife Jack!”

“*I never said you had to do all that!*” Jack says defensively.

“And I always lived a more rural life as you well know. But this here is a whole new level and you know it. Why Alaska? Who are you hiding my son from?”

The fish was starting to burn and in frustration Ed lifted it from the pan and tossed it onto the plate his nose wrinkled. He stared up at Jack who had his hands up in frustration.

“*And you know I can’t tell you that!*” Jack says, voice growing even more tense.

“So, you are hiding him.” Ed says evenly, anger in his eyes.

“I *didn’t say that*!” Jack says forcefully.

“Yes, you did,” Ed says calmly “whether you meant to or not.”

“Well, if you don’t think you can handle this anymore then I can find somewhere else for him.” Jack replies, voice turning cold and steady.

“That’s not what I’m saying and you know it!” Ed says in a rush “just need to know how to protect my son.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. It's all been taken care of… but with everything that happened today I can’t help but think this isn’t the best place for you anymore. Might be best to resettle you somewhere more urban. Get Will into school with kids his own age so he can learn how to interact.”

“You saying I don’t interact with him enough?”

“NO! what I am saying is that you’ve never been the most sociable man any way.” He holds his hand up to stop Ed who has opened his mouth to speak “And if Will is going to fit in to society, then he’s going to need some social skills. Human social skills… and it might be best for him to live somewhere with a little less wildlife.”

Ed grunts “All true I suppose.”

Jack lets out a breath “Good all settled then. I’ll make the arrangements.”

Chapter Two: First Taste

Chapter Two

First Taste

November 7th 1988

Baltimore, Maryland

Ed rushes around packing Will's lunchbox for the day.

Will stands by, watching him with a frown on his face, “I don’t want to *go*” he says, stamping his foot for effect.

Ed stops what he’s doing and turns to his son “We’ve been over this Will, we’ve been here a month now, we're settled in...”

“I’m not!”, Will butts in, before Ed could finish his sentence.

Ed continues unperturbed “And it’s about time you started to do what all the other kids are doing.”

Will's bottom lip juts out “why?”

“And that means preschool” Ed continues

“But why!?” Will asks again

“Because that’s what’s best for you, you’re three going on four, which means you're growing up, not long until school and you need to be ready”

“Why? just because aunt...”

“That’s just how things are” Ed says sharply, cutting Will off.

“But why?” Will whines.

“So, you can grow up and get a good job, have a good life” Ed says and then goes back to packing.

“Like what?” Will asks

Ed pauses “what?”

“What’s a good job?”

Ed shakes his head and zips up Wills bag while double checking he’s got his keys “Whatever you like! You could be anything you wanted kid, you’re so smart! smarter than I ever was.”

“Don’t want to be smart” Will says and crosses his arms.

Ed laughs “Can’t change that kid, it's a part of you.”

“It wouldn’t make a *big difference* if we waited just *one* more week…” Will tries.

Ed picks up Will's bag, goes over to Will and takes his hand. “No. Now. Its time, you’re ready.”

“No, I’m not, people are scary!” Will huffs.

“These people are your age; I think you'll find them different.” Ed begins pulling Will to the door then outside.

“But I don’t know how to be like them.”

“You just need practice. Not all the other kids are going to like you. But that's fine! if someone is worth your time, they’ll like you for you.”

“I don’t think so….” Will says thoughtfully “Other kids just aren’t so….” He paused looking for a word he didn’t yet know.

Ed locks the front door and then leads the way to the car. “You've never met another kid," He holds up his hands to stop Will from interrupting him "watching tv doesn't count. I know what you mean Will, but you just need to give them time. Maybe you're smarter than all the other kids you meet today. Just remember that doesn’t make you better than them, just more responsible for your actions”

Will glares at him “I knowwwwwwwww…. You’ve already told me that!”

Ed opens the car door for Will, helps him in and does up his belt before getting in on the other side of the car. “I’m glad you listen to me”

“Can’t actually stop it! I do have ears!” Will grumbles

Ed chuckles “I suppose that’s true” he glances at Will, who seems very irritated by Ed's happiness “Ready?” he asks, trying to keep the smile off his face.

“No!” Will replies

Ed nods “Good, let’s go”

Three months later…

The preschool is on the smaller side, chosen on purpose to ease Will into a life surrounded by people. Ed sits straight backed in an uncomfortable wooden chair opposite Will's teacher, Miss Jemma…. Apparently first names were a thing in preschools. To their right is a large window overlooking the classroom, Will is in there sitting on his own with a book… is he reading? Ed wondered with amazement suddenly.

"I'm glad we could finally meet, Mr. Graham" she says in a false sounding high voice and a smile on her face. Miss Jemma was a young woman with auburn hair, a big smile and a 50s style yellow dress. To cheerful, Ed eyed her warily.

"Now I would like to start by being open with you, Jack Crawford has already called and explained the situation. So, I know there are limitations in Will's case. A lack of history, no birth certificate…"

"Jack contacted you directly?" Ed butts in.

She looked taken aback for a moment at the interruption but nodded all the same. "As you know he organized Will's enrollment, at the time he was very forthcoming about

Will's circumstances" Ed raises his eyebrows "That surprises you?" she asks curiously.

"He's a busy man with a lot of people that work for him, thought enrolling a kid in preschool would be a bit of an easy job to delegate is all"

She nodded in understanding "He seems like a good man, going out of his way for the both of you"

Ed nodded "He is"

"So, I invited you in today to talk about Will."

"I guessed that much" Ed says dryly.

"Such a unique little fella" she says as she studies Will through the glass.

"As you know, there's a lot I can't tell you" Ed comments, thankful to Jack for the witness protection cover story.

Miss Jemma nods "Yes, but Will's history is not what I wanted to talk to you about, it's his future we need to discuss…"

"Meaning?" Ed asks, failing to hide the edge to his voice.

"I'm sure you've noticed that Will is bright?" She says her voice a little too sweet.

“Hard to miss”

“Right… well I *agree completely* that Will is *very bright*” she says, as if Ed was the one who’d brought it up…. He just manages to stop himself from scowling.

“He might even be the brightest child I’ve *ever* taught,” she says excitedly.

Ed cringes “probably… you been teaching long?”

She visibly deflates “a few years now.”

Ed nods “I see…” he says guessing a year at most.

“I have asked for advice from the other more experienced teachers, but the only suggestion was that this school is not the best fit for Will, that he probably needs something more specialized… But because of circumstances…”

“You can’t just pawn him off!” Ed finishes frustrated, "He's not been here long, and it's hard for him to go new places. Kid gets nervous."

“Not what I was going to say!” Miss Jemma says her smile tight, “But Will is clearly not engaging with his teacher or the other children.”

“He has trouble with that” Ed acknowledges.

“He’s been biting” Miss Jemma says.

“*Biting?* as in, more than once or twice?” Ed asks.

Miss Jemma nods “there’s always one kid that’s biting… but with Will… well, he gets stubborn about these things doesn't he.”

Ed considers his next words, “hmmmmm, what were the chomped kids doing?”

Miss Jemma sits back suddenly, “That’s besides the point Mr. Graham! Will can’t be biting the other children! If he has a problem he needs to use his words, not actions to solve it”

“Only works if the other kid is willing to listen” he says seriously.

“Mr. Graham, if Will cannot stop biting others, I will be forced to go to Jack Crawford directly! this cannot be allowed to continue.”

“I see” says Ed.

“Good… I hope for Will's sake you do, Will is… well I don’t want to belittle Will's bad behavior….. but he is an extraordinary boy, stuck in extraordinary circumstances….” Miss Jemma sighs, “he needs someone that specializes in children like him, we are simply not equipped to handle him. But of course we don’t have a choice, so we’re all just going to have to make do, which means dealing with this biting issue”

Ed nods “you’ve worked out he’s smart but have you explained it to him? He sometimes needs help reasoning things out, does better if you talk things through with him”

Miss Jemma manages to look affronted “We are very busy here, we don’t have the time to have a conversation with a child whenever we ask something of them. But just so you are aware, I have had conversations with him”

Ed smiles “how’d that go?”

“As well as you think it did….” she says without humor in her voice

Ed laughs, a sparkle in his eyes “He told me all about it”

“Of course he did! But from his own point of view… So, you knew why I wanted to talk to you all along?” says the teacher

Ed can’t keep the smirk off his face “Had an inkling….”

She frowns at him for a moment “well if you can have a better talk with him, better than what I managed… then please do try to get through to him, for Wills sake”

“Or yours?” Ed snips

“For everyone’s”

Ed nods, “I like a bit of honesty”

“May I ask…. What did he tell you about the situation?” Miss Jemma probes.

Ed smirks happily “That you told him only animals bite… so he asked what makes an animal different from a person…”

“And I-I-I… did my best to explain…” Miss Jemma pushes some creasers out of her dress.

“You did, you told him that animals bite and people don’t and because Will is a person he should never bite” He leans forward “Out of curiosity what was his reaction, from your point of view?”

Miss Jemma grimaces “later on he refused to join the other kids for lunch. When I asked him ‘why’, he asked how he should eat his lunch then? I told him, he should eat it normally”

“And… he asked you if he should eat it all at once” Ed said, still smiling, clearly enjoying himself.

Miss Jemma tries to not smile in return “and I made the big mistake of saying of course not! he should eat it one bite at a time”

Ed laughs “fell for that one, didn’t ‘cha?”

She smirks “I did….”

“Didn’t you know Miss Jemma, people should never bite” Ed parrots what Will had told him he’d said to her.

“He thinks he’s a comedian too….” She says holding back a huge smile “To tell you the truth, my husband thinks Will sounds hilarious... I have to be very stern with him also…I tell him what I’m about to tell you, it doesn’t matter how funny or smart a child is…. They should never resort to biting.”

“Likable man, your husband” Ed comments with a grin.

“As you already seem to know, our talk only went downhill from there” she says, squinting through the glass at Will.

“It seems to have put me in a rather difficult situation… especially with other parents who are justified in their complaints…” Miss Jemma sighs “One child even needed medical attention! What am I to tell them? I’m sorry Will’s too bright to follow the rules? Because I know these people and that’s not going to cut it” she finishes

“Will didn’t mention that!!” Ed said sharply

“I didn’t tell him, He is only Three..”

“Well.. bodily harm that requires medical attention is something I would have appreciated being told about” Ed drawls

“that is why I invited you here, Mr. Graham” She states

“Could have led with that part” Ed said without humor “Might have helped”

“You didn’t make this conversation easy yourself!” she says pointedly

Ed shrugged “sorry” he said not sounding particularly sorry “new at this whole ‘school’ thing Y’know?”

“He’s an only child?” she asked

Ed nods “he is” His voice losing all strength

Miss Jemma watches him “and your wife?”

“Not your business”

“No, it’s not” she said quietly then eyes Will who was still sitting on his own.

“He needs to know it's not ok to hurt someone.” he says seriously “I… I am sorry if I came across as not caring about his behavior, I do care, just don’t like other people having a say in how I raise my son, he's all I’ve got”

She nods “So what's the plan then Mr. Graham?”

“Honesty works best with Will, he has to understand that he has hurt someone… gone too far..”

“So, a serious conversation then?” Miss Jemma asks

Ed inclines his head “An honest Conversation”

“I was hoping we could agree on that.” She says

“I was also wondering if you would be the one to have the conversation with him? It might be best if it comes from you…”

“Coward” Ed remarks under his breath

Miss Jemma shrugs a small smile on her lips “Guilty as charged”

“Will’s going to have to see what he’s done wrong, He’ll need to apologise to the kid he hurt…” Ed leans forward “I’ll need the number for the parents…. we will have to go see them and Will, will have to apologize”

Miss Jemma nods then stands and starts ruffling through a drawer “just a moment and I’ll find it for you” she says.

“appreciated,” Ed replies.

“Here we are!” Ed says as they pull up into a driveway outside a suburban house. It’s a large house with a perfectly manicured lawn and garden.
Will scowls at it, his arms folded stiffly, bottom lip jutted out.

Ed sighs, “Come on Will” he says as he unbuckles his seatbelt.

Then because Will refuses to move, Ed reaches across and unbuckles him as well, “Let’s go get this over and done with” he states, while he ignores Will's silence, he gets out and walks around to Will's door and opens it.

“Come on Kid” he says

Will doesn't budge, instead he turns his face away and ignores his dad.

Ed sighs and scoops Will up into his arms, then shuts the truck door and begins to carry him to the front door.

“No!” Will shouts indignantly “Put me down!”

Ed does but also makes sure to take hold of Wills hand “You’re a very stupid Dad” Will says angrily as he stomps his feet.

“Ok” Ed says and continues to drag a reluctant Will up to the front door.

Ed rings the doorbell and waits

Will steps on his foot, hard, Ed ignores him..

The door opens to reveal a kind looking lady in jeans and a t-shirt.

“Hello” she says “you must be Will and Will’s dad” she smiles at Will who ignores her.

Ed nods “Ed” he says and holds out his hand.

“Sarah” she says and ushers them in “Well come on in then, Travis and Kurt are in the living room if you would just follow me” she says then leads them through the entrance and to the left. Ed follows her and pulls Will along with him, as Will tries to drag his feet in quiet protest. They come into a large room with a TV bigger than Ed had ever seen as well as several large expensive looking couches, all in peach, Ed hated peach! Too bland in his opinion, good as a fruit awful as a color for furniture.

There is a man seated on one of the couches, a tallish man who is folding up a newspaper and eyeing Ed skeptically.

Ed pulls Will up next to him, Will has gone sullen but compliant, for now.

“This is Travis, my husband” Sarah says with a smile “this is Will and his dad Ed”

Travis nods and is about to speak when Kurt, a child a little bigger than Will in stature, comes running in with a toy airplane. He suddenly notices Will and stops in his track’s.. turning he runs over to his dad, who picks him up and puts him on his lap. There in the arms of his father, completely safe, Kurt peeks over his dad's arm and eyes Will.

“Nice to meet you, Travis.” Ed nods at Kurt “hello Kurt. I’m Ed, Will's dad”

“Hi” says Kurt quietly

“And you are here so your son can apologize to my son?” Travis says, eyeing Will who sits rigidly next to his dad, eyes firmly fixed upon the ceiling.

Ed nods “yes, But first I thought it was important for Will to know the seriousness of what he has done” Ed shakes his head “Injuring your boy like that…”

Travis nods “good” very gently, he picks up Kurt’s arm which is covered by a bandage “He needed three stitches… and I am astounded that the school allows your son back! Behaving as he does, like an animal! And not just once! I’ve heard from other parents that Will had bitten their children also! And that teacher of theirs…” Travis huffs

“Miss Jemma” Ed adds helpfully

“Yes Miss Jemma” Travis says, clearly not finding Ed's interruption helpful in the slightest, “Insists on keeping him for reasons unknown to the rest of us... Your lucky my son was the only one that was injured”

Ed nods seriously as Sarah, who he had not even noticed had left, comes bustling back into the room with a tray of biscuits and drinks.

“In fact, if Kurt didn’t want to stay, we’d be moving him to another preschool”

“But he does want to stay” Sarah comments and sits down next to Travis

Kurt climbs off of his dad’s lap, goes to the tray, gets a biscuit and then sits down on the carpet by the coffee table

“Miss Jemma mentioned that there were mitigating circumstances?” Sarah says.

Her attention is turned towards Will, who is still silent and staring steadfastly at the ceiling.

Ed nods and tilts his head in consideration. “I’m not meant to talk about it really, but if you two can keep it to yourself, I suppose there's no harm in you knowing.” He pulls Will closer and squeezes his shoulder in an attempt to get him to relax a bit, Will does not.

“Of course we will keep it between us!” Sarah says

Ed nods “Wills in witness protection” he says and watches as Sarah covers her mouth. “Oh dear” she says.

“For him or you?” Travis asks.

“him” Ed says.

“Did he see something?” Sarah asks before holding up her hand "wait, I don't want to know do I?" she glances at her husband who is too busy staring at Ed to notice.

Ed nods seriously “Don't worry, I won't say a thing about it.”

“Something bad?” Sarah asks, glancing at her son.

“*shhh honey*, He can’t tell us anyway!” Travis says dismissively, eyes back on Will.

Sarah shifts back in her seat and smiles "Of course honey".

Ed doesn’t like Travis, he decides.

“Whatever your son did or didn’t see… It only further supports the idea that Will shouldn’t be in a regular school! He clearly has issues!” Travis says "The other children shouldn't have to be exposed to it through your son. It's not their fault, and it seems a bit ridiculous to make them pay the price for it."

“Not that simple is it” Ed says, “Witness protection doesn’t give a lot of options, Will is just going to have to learn how to manage where he is."

Ed pushes Will to stand up and takes hold of both his arms, holding them firmly to Will's sides.

Travis puts his hand out "Wait a minute Mr. Graham..."

Ed ignores the man and instead smiles at the other boy “Kurt” he says kindly, “Would you like an apology?”

Kurt looks to his dad who nods at him “Yes please” he says in a small voice.

Ed nods and tries to smile encouragingly “come on then, come stand In Front of Will”

Kurt checks again with his dad before coming over to stand In Front of Will and Ed.

Kurt had light hair and was not just taller but also broader than Will, but his face was softer somehow… He looked like his mother more than father, Ed decided.

He watches as Kurt follows Will's gaze to the ceiling, a little crease of confusion flitters onto his brow before turning his attention back to Will.

“Alright here’s the plan boys” turning to Will he says “you need to look Kurt in the eyes, as that's how apologies are made, always looking them in the eyes” Ed says pointedly.

Will shakes his head stubbornly

“Well, we’re not leaving here until you do! So, if you still want to spend the afternoon with your uncle and aunt, then I suggest you consider your options carefully… ”

Will frowns and lowers his head.

“Right in the eyes Will” Ed says.

Ed knows the moment that Will looks up, as Will’s body becomes rigid.

Ed looks at Kurt “how’d it make you feel? When Will hurt you?”

Kurt scrunches up his little face “It hurt!” he says.

Will's body is slightly trembling now.

“Do you see Will?” Ed asks but Will doesn’t reply, so Ed gives his arms a light squeeze “come on back Will.” He says “do you see what you did?”

Will nods

“Do you think maybe you should say sorry to Kurt?”

Will looks down at his feet. “I’m sorry.” He says “really, really, sorry” tears were appearing on his cheeks.

“Apology accepted” Sarah prompts.

“Apoldgay Akcepted” Kurt mimics, then turns and runs into his mum’s arms.

Ed picks up Will, who then clings to him, hiding his face in his shoulder. He makes a polite farewell, then takes Will back to the truck and gets him buckled back in.
He felt bad for making Will look, but felt that it was still for the best. Will had to understand that actions had consequences, If not for himself then for those around him. Will had to grow up knowing how to treat others or Ed will have failed in his job.

Chapter Three: Rivers are for Peace

Chapter Three

Rivers are for Peace

2nd of September 1990

Outside Baltimore, Maryland

The river was a swirl or clear greens and bronze as it passed where they stood on the rocks side by side. Will was holding his line in a mimicry of his dad, who observed his son with a small smile. He had found that they shared a love of rivers and any excuse for standing beside them. He also knew that Will found peace in so few places and so as much as he could, he would endeavor to bring him to such places as often as possible.

He knew that Will was in some ways very different to other children his age he was at the same time, painfully similar. His need for love and attention, for stability was as important as it was for any child.

Emotionally he wasn't dissimilar to other children. It was more his mental abilities that differed so much.

What he was and wasn't capable of had to be respected. How far to push? How much to protect? Ed found himself more and more often as Will grew not knowing where the line was between the two. Wills coping abilities were always moving, it was hard for Ed to keep up and know he was doing the right thing by Will. being a father was a heavy weight on his shoulders. He never got the chance to truly experience it with his first born. That had been his failing as much as her age, she'd taken with a fever as just an infant and had been gone the next day.

He ruffles Will's hair on impulse.

"Dad!" Will exclaims looking at him with a smile spread across his face so bright that Ed thinks himself the luckiest man in the world.

"Look at me." Ed says before he can stop himself.

Wills eyes shift to Ed's eyes proper, His own eyes go wide with knowing "I love you too." he says quietly.

"I know," Ed says as Will turns away and Ed could see that Will was struggling with something. His hands gripped his rod a bit too tight. "You ok Kid?" he asks.

Will nods "yeah, it's Just your feelings are very big."

Ed frowns and says quietly “I shouldn’t have asked you to look,” he gives Wills shoulder a squeeze “I’m sorry Will, that was selfish of your old da.”

Will shakes his head “No, I’m glad I saw… Our family is small but we have as much love as anyone else’s.”

“True that is son.” Ed nods a content smile on his face.

They fall again into comfortable silence for a time. Ed snags them some dinner and they tidy up and head back to the truck. Both know their jobs well and can do them side by side in silence. They finish packing up and pull out onto the road heading home.

“You ready for tomorrow?” Ed asks.

Will shrugs “no. But at least Kurt will be there.”

Ed nods, his eyes on the road “you two still getting along then?”

“He’s not what I thought he was.” Will says with a small frown on his face.

“People rarely are.” Ed replies.

“Then how do you know?” Will asks.

“Can’t read your mind son. Know what?” Ed prompts.

There's a moment of silence while Will stops still "know if someone is going to be your friend or not?” Will clarifies.

“Hmmmm,” Ed hummed to himself in thought “tell me something. When you look at someone, what do you see?”

“I don’t know. Depends how hard I look. if I don’t look too hard then…. Feelings and colors and voices sorta jumbled about?”

“But only for that moment?” Ed asks.

“Yes… I *think*. It’s confusing.”

“Let’s for argument’s sake say yes. You can know a person for the moment you look. But a moments not enough… will never be enough. We’re not simple creatures, we’re complex... changeable like the river, we flitter from one thought and feeling to another.”

Will was still in his seat watching his father avidly. “Who a person is in one moment might not be the same in another… so your gift alone won’t be enough for you to judge the character of someone. You’ll have to make do with the old-fashioned way.”

“What’s that?” Will asks.

“By spending plenty of time with a person. That’s how you get the lay of the land per say.”

“Oh.” says Will with slumped shoulders.

“No quick fix in picking your friend's son. Such an important decision. One of the most important ones you’ll ever make. Good to put effort into it… Besides, spending more time with people won’t harm you.”

“You're *always* saying that… but you don't even do it.” Will says jutting his bottom lip out.

“I do. When you're in school I work. Am friendly with the other staff and a fair few of the regulars…. And we’ve been to dinner several times at Sarah and Travis’s house. And that’s not even including all the times we’re around at Jack and Bella’s.” More and more buildings can be seen appearing as they head further back towards Baltimore.

“I could just look harder.” Will says with a pout.

“You think you’d see more if you did?” Ed asks

“I never look hard. It's too much. So, I just sort of look quick… but if I did…”

“Then you’d be invading a person’s privacy!” Ed interrupts with sudden shocking clarity he clenches the steering wheel.

“Its not my fault that I’m like this. its not my fault I can see people.” Will says

“No, it’s not. But the way I see it is we all have different lots in life. We all have to decide what to do with what we’ve got, You included.” Ed says and pulls over the car and turns in his seat so he can look at Will without distraction.

“Any of us can take the easy way out, but the best of us take the hard way… you understand?”

Will shakes his head “no.”

Ed sighs “well what about this; part of my lot in life was that I was born into poverty. My dad left my mom when I was young and my mom had problems of her own. It was a hard childhood and the easy road would have to use that as an excuse to behave however I wanted. But I saw other’s that did that and I didn’t like them… I didn’t want to grow up to be a person I didn’t like.”

“So, what did you do?” Will asks curiously.

“Me and your uncle Jack decided we would be police officers when we grew up. So, we made a plan. We worked hard and we got there. And I am very glad we did, if we hadn’t, I don’t think I'd have you right now. Or if I did you might not like your da as much as you do.”

Will looks a little offended at this “I'd always love you!” he says “No matter what!”

“Well maybe you would, but I wouldn’t and that’s important too.”

“How come you're not a policeman now?” Will asks after a moment

“I decided being a dad was more important.”

“Was it hard to stop?” Will asks quietly staring intently at his fidgeting fingers.

“It was hard. But worth it,” Ed says. “You see?”

Will nods “I should make friends the hard, boring way because it’s worth it.”

Ed nods “I think you’ll find that most people are worth the work of getting to know”

“But not all,” Will says with certainty.

Ed nods “there’s always going to be some. But most people have more good in them than bad.”

“Still,” Will says “I already have you and uncle Jack and Aunt Bella annnnnnd Kurt. That’s enough I think.”

Ed nods “I suppose for now that’ll do.” Then he pulls back out into traffic and heads home.

Their house is small but tidy. A happy place filled with the memories of the last two years. Ed muses about their life as he makes dinner. Fish and salad, a staple in their home. Will comes out after washing up in his Star Wars PJ's and plonks himself down at the dining table to wait. It was a good life Ed thought to himself… A content life. And while it still had its ups and downs it was worth it.

“Here we go.” Ed says and places a plate of food In front of Will.

“Thanks Da.” Will says and waits until Ed sits down before they both eat.

Ed sometimes still looked at Will and wondered about his origins. But he was finding it mattered less and less as time went on. It wasn’t about where he came from, he’d decided but where he was now… and where he would be.

That night Ed tucked Will in like usual, read him a story ‘Who sank the boat’, Kissed his forehead and wished him “Happy sailing”.

Will as usual replied “happy sailing da.” in return, a contented smile on his face.

Ed shut Will's door and then the hall door and did what he normally did at this time. Watch TV with a warm beer. He was happily doing just that when there was a knock at the door. He frowned in annoyance at his nightly routine being disturbed. But got up anyway and opened the front door.

Jack was standing there, a grim expression on his face.

“Can I come in?” Jack asks and Ed moves out of the way in reply and beckons Jack in, then closes the front door and follows Jack in. Jack sits down heavily on the sofa and Ed grabs another bear for his guest before sitting back down next to his friend and turning the TV off.

They sit there in silence for a bit sipping their beers.

Jack is the first to break the silence “Will?” he asks

“In Bed.” replies Ed

“Asleep?”

“I expect.”

“would you say he is a good sleeper?” Jack asks

Ed looks at him sideways “Kid sleeps like the dead.”

Jack nods “Good.”

“What's this about?” Ed asks

Jack rubs his hand over his face “you.”

Ed looks puzzled “me?”

“Yes you… you and your big mouth whining about Will being in witness protection! What were you thinking Edward?” he asks angrily “Well?” he continues when Ed doesn’t answer immediately.

“*You* told the preschool teacher that, not me.” Ed replies bemused.

“Under strict orders, documentation was signed to not tell anyone who doesn’t already know! All carefully done, properly done, not willy-nilly like you seem to be doing!”

“Who do you mean then?” Ed asks

“That fucking Lawyer is who! A lawyer Edward! And he works for the Prosecutor! Found your story of witness protection not quite right!”

Ed puts his hand up “you lost me Jack? What lawyer?”

“Travis fucking Blair! *That's who*!”

“As in Kurt's dad?” Ed asks quietly

“*Yes*, as in Kurt's dad… You obviously didn't do any checking into whose house you've been visiting all this time!”

“Well Fuck,” Ed says “Its bad?”

“*Yes* it's bad! He's been asking questions! Narcissistic bastard has it in for the FBI.”

They fall back into silence again. and again it was Jack who brakes it “I *honestly* thought you knew better.” He says

“maybe I would if I knew what you know.” Ed comments seriously.

"DON'T START!” Jack yells and Ed looks at the door to the hall nervously.

“Ok then. What now?” Ed asks

“*Now?* now we get you and the kid new last names and the hell away from here.”

Ed looks at him with a glare “No.” he says.

“*No?* what do you *mean* No? You don’t have a choice!” Jack glares at Ed who glares right back.

“What about Will? Kids settled, has a friend. We’re happy here.”

“Then maybe think about that the next time you go to run your mouth.” Jack says

“No.” says Ed again and takes a long drink of his beer.

“*That’s not good enough*. You got Will into this mess and now you’re going to have to deal with the aftermath!”

“*No*,” Ed says stubbornly.

Jack raises his arms in frustration “this isn’t just about you and Will! It's not just you who are in danger if this goes wrong!”

“What do you mean? You? You’re the FBI.”

“Doesn’t matter. Not with this. Me, Bella, you and Will, others… all in danger if this gets out.”

“What others?” Ed asks

“Blake Davis for one! And his family! Just had his first grandchild! You’d put them in danger?”

“Davis… as in your old mentor?” Ed asks

Jack nods

“right… you worshiped that guy didn't you? you'd have done whatever he said.”

“What are you trying to say?” Jack says

“That maybe Davis made mistakes and we're all just running around trying to clean them up… Because you got daddy issues and Davis was a sorta father figure for years. you really would do anything he said?”

Jack looks at Ed incredulously “good try.” he says

Ed shrugs “worth a shot.”

“Thought you could get me angry enough to talk?” Jack asks

“Something like that.” Ed replies with a smirk.

They go quiet again. both deep in their own thoughts.

“Davis still on the up and up?” Ed finally asks

Jack nods “Don't even know what he does anymore.”

“Or you don't want to tell me.”

Jack shrugs this time “Classified... which is why I don't know.”

“course it is,” Ed remarks “he know about the situation?”

“OH he knows. It's my job to keep him updated. He trusts me to take care of it. Or at least he did until you fucked it up.”

“Still afraid of disappointing your mentor.” Ed says

Jack side eyes him “You know I am.”

They both laugh. before falling back into silence and the occasional drink.

“But seriously Jack” Ed breaks the silence “Can’t the two of you sort this out another way? arrest whomever is coming after Will?”

Jack shook his head and put his beer down on the coffee table “who do you think is coming after him?" he asked

Ed shakes his head “I don't know? French scientists? the mafia? bad guys! what does it matter!”

Jack is laughing at him and Ed is irritated and confused... so out of the loop about his own son.

“Out of everything I thought would come out of your mouth *French scientists*!’” Jack is still laughing when he sees Ed's affronted face and laughs harder.

“I don't know! you don't give me much to work with!”

“it's fun to ruffle you up,” Says Jack “it's been awhile since I've managed it!”

“stop trying to distract me. Bad guys Jack. Who are they?” Ed asks seriously.

Jack sobers up suddenly “bad guys… I wish it were that simple. We sorted out the bad guys a long time ago now. Rooted out the last of them by the time Will was three. it's why we decided it was safe enough for you to move back here from Alaska… none of the bad guys left.”

Ed frowns in confusion “then why?”

“because of the good guys.” Jack replies

Ed shakes his head “blowed if I know what that means.”

“Davis and I, we saved Will from the bad guys and then hid him from the good guys, and with good reason. At least he has a chance now. At a childhood… maybe even a normal life. But every time you open your big mouth you put that all at risk… I know now the things the good guys will do. Things that make the bad guys not look as bad. And isn't that a thought to keep you up at night…. the terrible things even I’d do for the right reasons.” Jack leaned forward so that his elbows rested on his knees his face in his hands. He suddenly looked older to Ed. Frailer than Ed had ever seen him.

Ed wasn’t sure how to respond to this version of Jack. “Thank you for saving him,” he said finally.

Jack nods “It was the right thing,” he leans back again “It wasn’t just me of course, Davis was there too when we found him.”

“Is there someone looking for Will?” Ed asks

“No. Not currently and that’s how we need it to stay. If they knew… even had an inkling there was something left to find they would have already taken him.”

“Why do I get the feeling you're talking about the FBI?” Ed asks

Jack shakes his head “you’re thinking too small… I’m talking the FBI and the CIA and whatever else you can think of. All of them. I hate to admit it but you… we’re hiding Will from the Government.”

“Well shit.” Ed comments

“Arrangements are being made as we speak. You guys come over tomorrow for a fair well lunch. I’ll have the details by then.”

Ed shakes his head in disbelief “How am I going to explain this to Will?”

“I don’t know… you’re the father, work it out.” Jack says without remorse.

Ed sighed deeply and cut the engine of their truck. “Come on son,” he says “let's go see uncle Jack and Aunty Bella.”

With no further prompting Will undoes his seat belt, opens his door and gets down. Then, still ignoring his dad who was doing the same, went to the front door and knocks.

Bella opened the door and was swallowed by a hug from Will. She took Will by the hand and led them out back where Jack was cooking on the barbeque.

“Uncle Jack!” Will yells and runs over and hugs him also.

“Will.” Jack replies and gives him a pat on the back.

“Tell dad that we have to stay!” Will says

“I’m not your dad’s boss Will, It’s not up to me to tell him anything.”

“Yes, it is!” Will says loudly “you think everyone should do as you say!”

Ed reaches them “That’s enough Will.” he says tightly.

Jack raises his eyebrows at Ed but says nothing.

“I’ve got a present with your name on it inside.” Bella says to Will who bounces up and down in excitement “Yay!” Will says and smiles at her.

“Come on, let's go inside and have a look shell we? Let the grumpy old men talk?” Will nods and takes off back towards the house.

“Who are you calling old?” Jack asks with a smile as Bella heads back to the house following Will.

When the other two were out of earshot Jack turns to Ed “I think everyone should do as I say?”

Ed looks down at the steaks “sorry about that.” he says

“When I told you to work it out I didn't mean telling Will I think I'm in charge of everyone.”

Ed glances back the way Will and Bella had gone “Sorry about that. It was an awkward conversation.”

Jack pushes the meat around without purpose “You're lying about something…”

“No” Ed says butting in but Jack just raised his hand and continued.

“I know you well enough that I can tell when you're hiding something. But we can talk about that another day. For now Will thinks if he convinces me then you can stay… And if I don't then I'm mean uncle Jack.”

“Tell me that's not true.” Ed comments

“It's *not* and you *know* it. This move isn't just about me, it's about you and Will staying safe. Anyway you’d have had to move in another year or so anyway. Harder to keep track of people that don't settle anywhere for too long. this is what is best for everyone involved.”

“Says Jack Crawford.” Ed says bitterly.

“This isn't forever. Davis thinks in the next five to ten years we can stop having to worry too much about hiding him and you can settle down more permanently.”

“In five years he’ll be ten! in ten, fifteen! he needs stability now!” Ed hisses.

“He can't have it… not like you want for him. Not without risking everything we’ve been trying to do. You haven't seen what I've seen Ed. If you had you'd see things differently.”

“And we’re back at the part when I say I would if you told me.”

“Isn't it enough just to trust me.” Jack says earnestly.

“I’d trust you with my life.”

“And I you with mine.”

“But Will is more precious to me than my life or yours. I need more than trust when it comes to him I need certainly.” Ed replies seriously.

Jack turns over the meat “I wish I could give it to you.” He says.

“So do I.” Ed replies.

Chapter Four: Where the Wild Things Are

23rd September

1990 Farmington, Maine

Will stood holding his dad's hand at the front of the class. All the other children had stopped what they were doing to stare at him. He resolutely stared at the ground trying to ignore the weight of so many eyes.

The teacher was a middle-aged man dressed casualty in jeans and a sweeter “Everyone say hello to Will” he says with a wide smile.

“*Hello Will*” the children chorus boredly.

Ed squeezed Will's hand “Hello” he prompts quietly.

Will sucked in a breath “Hello” he says. he’d meant it to be loud, but his voice came out wispy, trapped partly in his mouth by his lips unwillingness to move.

After that everything became a whirlpool of newness. A circular table with other children and an endless tide of questions. interest in the new boy and why he was starting some weeks later than the rest of him led to some forced whispered responses. In amongst it all his dad had left him here before he’d even noticed… Disappearing in the noise of the room.

Will rubbed his hands over the cool surface of the table trying to reign his thoughts back in… to make them manageable. There were a lot more kids in elementary than had been at preschool and Will missed his old life suddenly. He wanted to go home.

Slowly the other kids lost interest in the new kid as the teacher redirected them to another activity. Coloring pictures of flowers with strong smelling crayons. Will recognized the flowers as daffodils and did his best to color them how he remembered them… his aunt loved Daffodils. He frowned to himself when the feelings of sadness started to itch their way up his throat and into his mouth and eyes. He missed his aunt and uncle, his old house and Kurt.

His dad had told him he’d see his uncle and aunt again at Christmas but that was so far away and he missed them now. He still didn't understand why his dad had made them move or why Uncle Jack hadn't told him not to.

His Da was afraid of something he knew… had seen it in his eyes. But he couldn't tell what… and no one would tell him. So here he was in a class of not-Kurt's coloring daffodils.

The classroom had the advantage of having a reading corner with large pillows. The other children seemed uninclined to use it, which meant that Will was inclined to. It was the most

peaceful spot in the classroom and at any chance he could be found there curled up with a book.

Other than himself there was only one other child that used it with any regularity. At first he disliked her for it. But she was the quiet type like himself and for the first while they never spoke. She huddled in her corner and he in his until their teacher called them from their safe space and to another activity.

She had the same name as Kurt's mum. He liked that about her. As well as her pick in books although he was sure she was not even reading them. He would watch her sometimes… her eyes glancing right past the words and focusing in on the pictures.

At home his da kept asking if he'd made any friends. So one day he told him "A girl named Sarah". It was worth it to see how happy it made his da. Also he wasn't so sure it was a lie? She was the closest thing to a friend he'd managed to make. Anyway, at the very least they were comfortable with each other's company.

The day after his epiphany about Sarah being his friend he sat right next to her in the reading corner, Ignoring his usual spot. She shifted a little to give him room and they fell into peaceful silence. Mission accomplished.

That was how they continued, the quiet ones in class. Side by side.

Ed liked Will's classroom. Nowadays they were brighter places than what he'd grown up with. He looked at the art works on the walls. He could pick out Will's without needing to squint to see the names written on the bottom corners. Will's weren't that much better than the other kids… Just different, more accurate. Will always tried to be exact in most things he cared about.

Mr. Armstrong stood next to him "Will is bright. Very bright… Gifted"

Ed sighed long suffering. "I know"

"Then may I ask why you don't want him moved up a year or two?"

"Social skills" Ed comments

"Social skills are important but moving up just a little shouldn't affect that"

"I want him with Kids his age"

"Will can already read and write to a 4th grade level. His math skills are 2nd grade… and that's without any outside encouragement. Just for a moment imagine what he could be

capable of with the right input?"

"You care that much about it then you do it" Ed says, already bored of the conversation.

This is Jack's fault of course. Every time they move it will be the same he realizes. Teachers… They all thought it was their right to tell him how to raise his son. It was frustrating… and if one more person told him how smart Will was…

"In a class of 25 kids? I just don't have the time"

"Then he'll get there when he gets there. Besides, Will has made a friend in this class, won't jeopardize that"

"A friend?" Mr. Armstrong asks

"A girl, Sarah?"

"Oh her. they do sit together a lot in reading corner"

"that's the one" Ed replies

"You do know they just sit there next to each other and read, they don't particularly talk" Mr. Armstrong says

"Will doesn't need to talk an awful lot to be close to someone"

I see Mr. Richards. So you wont budge?"

"Nope" Ed replies, it is still a little strange to be called by a different name. But he's getting used to it.

"Have you given much thought into having him tested?"

"Nope"

The teacher rubs his face and sighs in frustration "how about a compromise? I give him work from older grades instead. I'll ask one of the teachers from that grade to mark his work. He stays here… *Socializes*… but gets some much needed challenge"

Ed thought for a moment "On one condition"

Mr. Armstrong nods "what condition?"

"His friend gets to do the same work as Will… so he's not the only one"

"I don't know what Wills told you about Sarah, but she's not bright" Mr. Armstrong says.

Ed pushes down a flare of anger "She reads doesn't she?"

Mr. Armstrong shakes his head "Likes the pictures I think"

“Then let Will tutor her. It will be good for them both. He’ll help her learn, She’ll help him learn. They can move on to harder stuff together. At whatever speed he can teach Sarah at”

Mr. Armstrong looked taken aback “Sounds like a lot of work” he comments

“Maybe. Maybe not. Will might surprise you”

Mr. Armstrong looked at the art works on the wall and paused at one with Sarah’s name on it. Ed eyed it also, it was clearly the best in the class.

“We’ll trial run your idea. If it doesn't seem to be working after a month then we can try my way” Mr. Armstrong says

“Deal” Ed replies.

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3 years later…

Will and Sarah crash through the undergrowth sticks in hand. Bike helmets and knee and elbow protection on. Knights of the kingdoms in the trees.

“This way!” Will cries and swoops his stick dramatically through the air making a whistling noise. “The kingdom of the bear awaits!”

“Finally!” Sarah says and half-heartedly swishes her stick also “for we have traveled so far and fought so hard to reach it”

Will smiles brightly at her “Indeed great knight! … and now perhaps our quest will finally come to an end!”

They continue on further in with Will in the lead until they come upon a clearing where the sun breaks through.

“Behold!” Will shouts with triumph “The great and ancient kingdom of the bear!”

Sarah jumps into the air “Haray! We are done!”

“Now” Will says seriously “We must return the lost prince to his father and put an end to this bloody war!”

Sarah turns and removes her back-pack, placing it on the ground. From in it she pulls a polar bear soft toy that has seen better days. She places it on the ground and kneels before it. Will joins her.

“Great prince return to your father and tell him all that you have seen” Says Will

“and all that we have done for you!” Sarah adds and stands, takes hold of the toy and half crouching makes it move as if running across the grass and places it on a half rotten stump.

“You are home dear friend” Will says

“We will miss you dear bear” Sarah says sadly “But now you are safe and home”

“And we have many others who need our help” Will adds before bowing to the bear prince and turning to leave. Sarah follows closely behind, collects her back-pack and together they pause and look back where the trees meet the grass.

“The twilight star Knights to the rescue again!” Sarah yells and raises her stick. Will raises his and they both howl and spin around before running off along a well worn track, the smell of moss in the air.

Will stops every now and then to let his friend catch up.

“See you tomorrow” Sarah says when they come to the tree they have come to call ‘the parting’.

“See you!” Will replies already running towards home. Will crosses a road and goes along the street and around the corner. Then up another street and through a path between houses onto his street.

Upon seeing his uncle and aunts car parked outside his house he picks up speed again. The front door is open when he gets there and he races through and out back to the back yard where he knows they’ll all be. “Uncle Jack! Aunt Bella!” He yells and runs to jump at them where they are standing around with Barbecue with his da.

“Will!” Jack exclaims with a grin “hello kid!” and gives him a one handed hug.

“How's my sparrow?” Bells asks and gives him a big hug squeezing him tightly.

“Joyful” Will replies enthusiastically.

“That is wonderful to hear!” Says Bella with a smile stretched across her face.

“You been having fun with Sarah?” Ed asks

Will nods “we united the great bear king with his kidnapped son”

Jack half chokes on a mouthful of beer, his eyes momentarily widen.

Ed gives Jack a warning look. “I’m sure you did” Ed replies to Will a smile at the corner of his mouth.

Will and Sarah sat with their backs against the brick school building. The sun was warm and pleasant. Will had his eyes closed, his fingers fiddling with the grass.

“why don't you ever look anyone in the eye?” Sarah asks breaking the silence.

“I already told you, they’re too much for me… I don't even know why it matters”

“Because it feels like your ignoring me half the time” Sarah replies

“Well I’m not”

“Lily-Grace says she thinks you have what her cousin has. He doesn't look at eyes either”

Will perked up “Really?... what does he have?”

“I can't remember now. But it's a real thing.” She said

Will often felt like the only one in the world that could see… but maybe there were others! He could hardly wait to tell his da.

“have you ever looked at my eyes?”

“I have… there brown”

“I mean properly" She leaned in close so her face was nearly touching his "you could now"

Will frowns and shrugs “I've looked at them enough… don't want to now”

“But why not?”

“Because I don't want to!”

“Not even just once?”

“NO”

“why not?”

“NO!”

“You're not even listening. I’m meant to be your best friend! just do this one thing!”

“You’re not *listening* and you're meant to be my best friend as well!”

Will scoots back angrily.

“Just tell me why you won't!” Sarah says “It’s not even hard…”

“It is for me” Will says shortly

“It's hard for you to look at my eyes?”

“Yes” Will says and gets up and puts his back-pack on.

Sarah stands up also “your going to run off like usual aren't you”

Will starts running. He runs faster than she could ever hope to and finds a hiding spot to finish recess in peace.

That night when Will arrived home late he slam's the front door behind him. He’d been waiting for Sarah like usual at the parting tree for hours. She hadn't turned up.

“Will?” Called his da from the living room.

“Here” replied Will and joined his da, sitting down heavily next to him.

“you alright son?” Ed asks

“No” Will replies with a pout

“Want to talk about it?”

“Yes” Will replies “I waited at the parting tree for hours! and she never came”

“I see… Did anything happen today, at school maybe?”

“I ran away from her at recess… but only because she was trying to make me look at her eyes! Its stupid!”

Ed hums “or normal”

Will whirls around to face his da gaping at him.

“What? It *is* normal, an important part of communication. We all do it” Ed says seriously.

“Not *everyone*” Will says sourly

“Not you” Ed comments

“It's *not* just me. Sarah told me that Lily-grace said that her cousin has something and he doesn't look at eyes either”

“Was I meant to be able to follow that?” Ed asks after a moment.

Will growls angrily and snakes his hands on his legs “*you always take her side!*” he spits out. He gets up and stomps as loudly as he can manage to his room and slams' the door good and proper. Then just because he wants to make doubly sure his da herd he opens it and slams it again as hard as he can. He screams at the now closed door and throws himself onto his bed.

Eventually his da knocks on the door like Will had been waiting for him to do. He ignores him, with the hope of making his da as upset as himself. His da being the horrible father that he is, comes in anyway and sits next to where Will was laying on his bed.

“I know it's harder for you. But it's only natural to want someone to look back at you when you talk to them” Ed says quietly.

“That's stupid!” Will bites out “Eyes are just strange blobs in peoples skulls… what's so important about that?”

Ed doesn't immediately answer, instead he sits for a bit to think on how best to explain. “Tell me something… When you look at my nose, what happens?” He asks the boy eventually

“I see your nose” Will replies “*Obviously*”

“And my chin?” Ed then asks

“*Then I see your chin*!”

“And my lips?” Ed asks

“*The SAME*!” Will replies “this is *stupid*!”

“What about my eyes?” Ed asks finally.

Will goes still realizing he’s been caught out “So what! who cares!”

“Exactly” says Ed unperturbed “eyes are different… even for you”

“But why are they different?” Will asks, wiping angry tears from his eyes.

“Don't think anyone really knows”

“You mean you don't know. Do you even know anything?”

“Maybe… but its natural for your best friend to want you to look you the eye”

“I don't like it! and I *hate it* when people try to make me!” He turns over to look at Ed’s face “Besides I have looked at her stupid eyes before! not my fault if she’s too stupid to notice”

“No one can make you. not really son. It’s going to have to be something you choose”

“Not if someone grabs your chin and pinches your arm until you do!” Will says bitterly.

“Has someone done that to you?” Ed asks quietly.

Will turns back over so his back is to his da.

“*Has someone done that to you*?” Ed asks again Will shakes his head.

“You *need* to tell me if someone has” Ed says and goes to grab Wills shoulder to comfort but decides against it and puts it back down at his side. Will doesn't respond. Instead he continues to stare stubbornly at the wall.

“Was it uncle Jack? you can tell me if it was” Ed reaches out and doesn't pull back this time, instead he squeezes Wills shoulder “This is very important Will… if it was Uncle Jack then you gotta tell me now”

“Why does it even matter who?” Will asks

“Remember how we talked about this? *Our* secret. No one else can know especially your uncle Jack and Aunt Bella”

Will shrugs off Ed's hand, turns around and sits up “why?... It wasn't uncle Jack or aunt Bella. I haven't told anyone just like you said… but why does it even matter so much?”

Ed turns away from Wills gaze “Just don't think they’d understand” he says

“LIAR!” Will yells and shuffles away from Ed and stands up.

Ed stands also “*Maybe*… but whatever I say or don't… I do it for you, to keep you safe”

“*What ever*” Will says angrily and moves to leave his room for the living room.

“Wait right there son. We haven't finished” Ed says and reaches out to stop Will who dodges him easily.

“*Yes we have*” Will snaps and is already moving down the hall.

Ed follows behind “*no we haven't!* you haven't said who made you look!”

“Doesn't matter” Will replies and turns around to face Ed now that he has led him out of his room.

“*This is important!*”

“Says *you*”

“*Yes*, says me! your *father*”

“Well I'm smarter than you so I think I’ll decide what's important for myself” Will says and darts by his Dad and back into his room but before he can close his door Ed manages to get a hold of his arm.

“It doesn't *matter* how smart you think you are, you're only eight years old. I’m the adult here and it's my job to protect you. You may think you know the way of things but you don't”

“LET GO OF ME!” Will yells and twists, managing to get out of his fathers hold but Ed is standing in the way of the door.

“GO AWAY!” Will screams “GO AWAY GO AWAY GO AWAY”

“Not till you tell me *who made you look*!”

“FUCK YOU!” Will screams and starts to cry.

Ed sucks in a deep breath “You're ok. But you have to tell me what's going on… I’ve never seen you like this and it's worrying me!”

“I JUST WANT YOU TO LEAVE ME ALONE!” Will shouts and then Ed is aware of a pain in his arm.

He steps back and looks down only half aware of the blur of Will as he runs past him. There is a pencil in his arm. Then the front door slams shut and Ed is brought back to the present. He pulls the pencil from his arm and throws it to the ground. Turns around and runs after Will.

Out on the street it is dark and cold.

“Will!” he calls out “Come back!”

He can’t see any sign of him, he rushes back inside and sees that Will's coat is still there with his shoes. He puts on his boots and jacket and runs back outside.

“Will!” he shouts “Will *PLEASE*!”

Not knowing what direction to go in he takes off on the path Will usually goes to meet up with Sarah. Even though Will is so much faster than him he has to try. It's cold out, his breath visible before him. Will is only eight. Just a wee boy. He stumble runs to the parting tree but Will is not there. Just mandarin skins laying on the ground where one of the kids had dropped them.

“WILL COME BACK! I'M SORRY!” He cries out hoarsely into the trees.

Silence greets him. He rushes home on shaking legs and barely notices the journey back. He rushes into the kitchen without removing Jacket or boots. He picks up the phone and calls Jack's number.

“Jack! it's Will he’s run away! We had a fight. He forgot his shoes and jacket and it's cold out… I know you said no police but…”

He pauses listening to Jacks gruff voice "What ever you do, do not go to the police! I'm on my way now and I'll have Davis on the phone in a moment. We'll figure this out just hold tight"

“It can’t wait that long!” Ed is frozen on the spot half listening to the front door half to jack.

"your going to have to! He might come back so sit tight and I'll call you back once I've talked to Davis"

“I can’t just wait, you don't know him like I do. He’s stubborn as a mule he won't come back any time soon he’d sooner freeze”

"Kid won't freeze from what I've seen he's immune to temperature"

“So what if he doesn't notice the cold! That doesn't mean he can’t freeze!”

"I have to go call Davis, I don't have time for this now. Just sit tight and lets hope he comes back though the door"

“Please don't take too long… I can’t lose him” He puts the phone down and pulls up a chair and sits next to it. Awaiting Jack's call.

Will runs as fast as he can, his heart pounding in his ears. He soon left the houses behind and was in the trees. He ran for the clearing on instinct and crumpled next to the soft toy polar bear and hugged its soaked body to his chest.

After some minutes of that he was aware of his da’s voice calling out to him. He stood up and peeled his soaked socks from his feet and tossed them down on the ground. His feet felt the dirt and grass but they were not cold. He never felt the cold. His da was always making him dress warmly. But he didn’t need to, not really.

He tentatively walked back into the trees and headed to the parting tree. But there was no one there. He must have imagined it. Why would he be calling for him after what he’d done.

The pencil had been on his desk by the door. He had barely noticed it then it had been in his hand and he had jabbed it as hard as he could into his da’s arm. His da’s eyes had widened and Will had run for it before he could fully understand what he’d done. He hadn't been intending to use it like that had he? *Why had he grabbed it*? He hadn't wanted to hurt his da… *not really*. But he had. He’d stabbed his da and ran away and now he had nowhere to go.

He was alone for the first time in his life. He wished he’d never picked up the pencil… but it was too late now. As his da always said it was hard to put the honey back in the jar once you’d poured it out on the floor. Better to think before ruining good honey.

He had not noticed how he was crying until he had curled on the ground his arms around the bear toy and he started balling before he knew how to stop it. A noise from behind him got his attention. A snorting breath that grazed his skin.

he twisted and stood to come face to face with a massive stag. Black and covered in feathers it regarded him silently.

Will watched it without fear. Slowly he lifted his hand to stroke its face. It moved closer and muzzled at his hair.

“Come along” A clear deep voice said with in his head “the humans don’t deserve you”

Then it turned and began walking into the trees “You were never meant for them. Come along and I’ll take you home” Will turned glancing back at the parting tree for a moment. He couldn't go home now. Not after what he’d done.

He turned back to find the stag watching him. Still clutching the toy Will took one heavy step after another after the creature, his steps becoming lighter as they began to run. The air that filled his lungs felt alive, the dirt under his feet called to him. If he could just run far enough away maybe he would stop feeling empty. heavy. Sad sad sad.

Chapter five: Far from Home

October 14th 1993

Farmington, Maine

Ed hadn't slept all night, had been on the phone with Jack a couple of times. Jack who would be arriving with a team of people any moment, would set themselves up in his house and find his son, if he was still alive. It had been a cold night and Ed couldn't stop the horrible weight that had come to live in his chest. Constricting, tight, painful.

When they did arrive, they barreled on in without need of invitation, setting themselves up in the living room and began pouring over maps. Making the space seem some how foreign, and unlike the home he and Will had been happy in just the day before.

"Still nothing?" Jack asks as he comes across to stand with Ed who is observing everything.

Ed shakes his head and rubs his face with trembling hands "He's been gone all night! I should of rang the police when I wanted to!"

Jack sighs "I know this is hard, But Will is tough… he's going to be fine. We'll find him and you two will go on like you have been. If you had called in the police, it might have got to the wrong people… missing kids tend to cause a stir, especially at Will's age. You might not have ever seen him again."

"Is that a treat Jack?" Ed asks coldly.

"It's a reality check" Jack replies, then he goes into the kitchen and pulls out two mugs.

"I'll make us both a coffee and then I'll catch you up on the plan" Jack turns and finds the jug and fills it with water. "Davis will be here soon… he's going to want a detailed explanation" Jack says as he finds the coffee and sugar at there usual place by the toaster.

"Isn't he a big shot?" Ed asks

Jack nods

"Will that much of a threat to him?" Ed asks

"Not as much now" Jack says gruffly

"Then why come all this way when he's got it covered with all you lot?" Ed asks

"He has his reasons" Jack replies while looking out of the kitchen window.

Ed shrinks back a little “that’s what I’m afraid of… Just… Just find my son, I don’t care how or who you have to go through, as long as he’s ok”

Jack huffs “That’s what we’re all here for”

“He’ll be in the tress near the river, he likes it there…. I tried looking but he’s better on his feet than I am and he’s angry at me I reckon…”

“We came prepared for that” Jack replies as he pours boiling water into the cups “we already have a helicopter searching for him and the men Davis brought in are very good at this sort of thing, so its only a matter of time”

Jack stirs both cups and adds milk before passing Ed one “so try not to worry so much, I’m not”

Will and the raven-stag had run through the night until the first gleams of light could be seen through the trees. The ground was rocky in places with moss and smaller plants scattered about.

Will found he wasn’t tired, instead he felt the most awake he could ever remember feeling. It turned out wide-awake was not all bad and not all good, he was glad of it so he could enjoy the sights, smells, feel of the wilderness. His body came alive with it all; he was stronger, faster, more himself somehow. It was bad because of the sharp pain of the knowledge of how he had come to be here in the first place, a feeling that inevitably settled into a painful weight in his stomach ‘guilt’ he thought sadly.

He was sat by a river hugging the bear toy, his feet partly submerged, but rivers were for him and da. Even with the raven-stag’s proximity (he could sense him further back in the trees keeping watch) being here without his da felt lonely… bittersweet he supposed, suddenly understanding the concept with the clarity of experience.

He stood, placed the toy on the rocks and stepped into the flow until coming to his thighs, cupping his hands he scooped up water and drank. Finding it pleasing he drunk again until his thirst was quenched and still, he stayed there enjoying the calm, and the faint chitter the fish made when saying ‘I’m here’ or ‘danger there’ or other little fish things.

He was hungry and without a rod, so the noise of the fish teased him. He tried to chitter back in a way that might coax them close enough to snatch up. It worked to bring them nearby. but each time he tried to grab a hole of one it slipped from his fingers and dashed away chittering ‘danger’ to any fish that’d listen.

Still, he'd have to eat eventually, he turned and left the river and deciding to make his own line he wondered into the trees in search of a good strong brunch. The raven-stag fell instep beside him as he went.

"going to make a fishing line" he said to it.

It didn't comment, content to observe for now. Will set about the sticks he could find on the ground, but none were any good. When he tested them, they'd just snap, he needed something fresher he decided. Which meant finding the one new one among all the old, or trying to break one off.

After giving up on finding one on the ground he spied one he thought good on a tree but even when he'd put all his weight into it the thing had stayed firmly attached to the tree. He let out a frustrated huff.

"Could you at least help?" he asked the raven-stag.

Still, it did not reply, instead it just watched him silently, observing all his failed attempts with blank curiosity. Frustrated Will leaped into the air and hung of the brunch he swung down then bounced a bit, staying put. "Ahhhhhh!" he shouted with frustration and turned to the raven-stag "are you even real!?" he asked it.

"Depends whom you ask" it replied unhelpfully.

Will shook his head then having another idea wondered around the ground looking for a usefully sharp looking rock. He found one by the river and raced back to the branch and began sawing it. It took longer than he thought it would but when it was down to a few millimeters he was able to bend it down and snap it.

Pleased he twisted around looking for anything he could use for string. After some looking, he found a reed in a damp ditch with a tan puff on top. Plucking it he tried tying it to the end of his stick but the reed simply bent and became weak and fell apart at any tug. In the end he used some reads to tie one on, he was not pleased with the outcome and felt he wasn't going to fool even a stupid fish with it.

But without any better ideas he decided to do his best. There were insects about he could use for bait but with no way to attach it he decided to try without. Squatting on a rock by the river he lowered one end in and listened out for the fish.

Eventually he managed to hear them chittering to each other. "Come see the thing" he tried to chitter to them "it might be food… come see"

The mention of food always got their attention "food?" they chittered and came closer.

Will moved his line a little "food" he chittered.

The fish came close enough; he could see them circling near his rock.

"surface" he tried suggesting and one bit the end of his line and he yanked up. The fish let go and was gone in a second "danger, danger, danger" it chittered and the river around him was

suddenly empty.

He threw his make shift line to the ground angrily and started to cry. He was hungry! and he didn't know how or where to find food. But he couldn't go home now he was a criminal. 'It's hopeless' he thought to himself.

"Clever child" the raven-stag got his attention. Will ignored him.

"The humans make weapons from sticks do they not?" it asked turning its head to the side to look down at his stick.

Will shrugged "so"

The raven-stag snorted "you are a clever child" it said and wondered off again.

Will watched it go with a frown on his face, it was an annoying companion sometimes. But he picked up his stick again and went in search of the sharp rock he'd used to cut the stick off in the first place before returning to his rock by the river.

Slowly, carefully be bargain rubbing and scraping at the end. Trying to create a point that was sharp enough to spear a fish on. The sun was in the middle of the sky by the time he'd made something he was pleased with. Standing back up he waded quietly back into the river until the water was again at mid-thigh depth.

There he stood as still as possible and listened carefully for the tell-tale chittering of the fish. They were about the place but not by him. "Food" he chittered "safe, food"

Several appeared near him then checking out the area, he held his breath, took aim, and missed. When his stick hit the water, he had not anticipated the level of resistance. The fish were startled off again and he had to wait while staying stone still again. He needed them to come close enough to hear his chittering back at them. "Food, safe" he repeated whenever he heard one in the distance.

But none approached again for some time apparently remembering his last attempts. When they did come back Will did not go for the first one that came close. Instead, he stilled himself, remembered he'd need to put a lot of strength into it, more than he thought he would. He waited until one came close to the surface, then faster than last time and with as much strength as he could muster, he took aim and struck.

triumphantly he lifted the hand-made spear skywards the fish on the end fluttered about uselessly.

"I did it!" he declared to the sky and wished his da had been there to see.

He made his way back to the rock and sat down with his toy bear, found his sharp rock and cut the head of the fish as quickly as he could manage. Then he removed the spear and looked at his headless fish. He'd seen his father prepare fish many times, but only as a passive observer. Now he wished he'd taken more notice of exactly what he'd done.

He knew he had to take the scales of, so using the rock to scrape he did his best to remove what he could. It was not as easy as he imagined it would be. But after some work he'd done an okay job by his own estimation, next we cut along its belly.

The rock was not sharp and it was a mess by the time he'd finished. But he was sure he'd done about what his da normally did. But now… his da normally took some of the fish out. But looking at it he found he'd never noticed exactly what.

His did not look at all like the neat work his da normally did, which wasn't helping. He put his fingers in and found some gross smelling stuff that seeped out. He rinsed the fish in the river and knowing he had no way to cook it, took a bite. He grimaced at the awful flavor's but that didn't stop him. He was hungry and he knew he needed to eat, so he ate what he could stomach, and left the rest for what ever creature would find it first.

From there he travelled further up river until he came to a large flat rock. It was warm from the afternoon sun and will took of his wet clothing and spread them out to dry. Then he lay on his back, his head partly on the bear. In the warmth of the sun, he drifted off without meaning to.

When he awoke the sun was already fading on the horizon he got up and put his now dry cloths back on. He drank some more water and then headed up to where he could make out the raven-stag waiting for him. Together they took of at a run and Will felt himself awaken fully, his lungs felt full and his feet light. It was good to run… it was better than anything, and if he just kept running maybe he could keep away the remembering.

He could live like this he decided, no remembering just running on and on, forever.

Ed sat at the kitchen counter and watched the agents that had taken over his living room work. They were in constant communication with both each other and the agents out searching.

He was exhausted and headachy but he barely noticed this. He felt emptied out and numb, the agents talked but their words sounded foreign and distant. They hadn't found him yet and he'd been gone two nights.

Ed hadn't really slept, how could he? Every now and then Jack would storm his way though the house and make him eat and drink.

He couldn't bear to be more than hearing distance from the front door, just in case. So, he only moved to use the bathroom or to try and get some sleep slouched near the front door.

When Jack next came back in, he had with him two take-a-way coffees, he handed one to Ed who drank some.

“You said Davis would be here yesterday” Ed says “if he can help find Will faster then get him here”

“Shit happens, can’t be helped, he says he’ll be here by tonight… believe it or not he’s got bigger worries that Will”

“Really?” Ed said quietly then he turned to look at Jack squealy “because I don’t”

He moved in close and brought up his hand with in inches of Jacks eyes “And I am this close” he touched his thumb and finger together “to saying fuck it and going to the police, the media and whoever the fuck else I can think of to get my boy back”

Jack eyed him with eye brows raised “do that and there’s a good chance you’ll never see him again”

“At least I’ll know he’s alive!” Ed all but yelled.

Jack having barely slept himself sighed “we found a soft toy… a bear by the river with a half chewed-on fish and a hand made spear. Any of that ring any bells?” he asked

Ed shook his head “Will doesn’t have a teddy bear”

“Either way it’s worth them checking out, they have the dogs on it… whomever it is there’re traveling north along the river”

Ed straitens suddenly “its him” he says

Jack looks at Ed hopefully, not just because he loves the kid (who is as much his nephew as Ed is his brother) and is worried sick for him. But also, because they need to find him or Davis would make him pay, Bella would never forgive him and Ed might actually murder him.

“You sure?” Jack asks

“As sure as I can be” Ed said hope making its way into his head.

Jack nods “Davis has reassured me he has the best on this. They will find him and bring him home; you have my word on that. Wills tough and smart and if that was him then he’s got access to water and maybe a food source”

“Any sign of a fire? For cooking?” Ed asks

“Not that I know of… “ Ed shakes his head.

“Then he’s not as smart as he thinks he is”

“You were expecting the kid to be MacGyver?” Jack asks incredulously.

“That half eaten fish you found raw?” Ed asks

“yep”

“And they were sure it wasn’t something an animal caught?”

“Unless animals have worked out how to go spear fishing…”

“Then he’s far stupider than we gave him credit for” Ed says dryly and upon seeing Jacks surprised look adds “never eat raw fresh-water fish… could have all sorts to make you sick”

“Any one else would be impressed” Jack says with a shake of the head "He *is* eight"

“I’m just making sure to take note for the next time he gets too big for his britches” Ed says dryly.

Jack laughs for the first time in days “that’s the spirit!” he says and Ed rewards him with a small smile of his own.

They had travelled for some hours at a run before Will declared himself tired and they stopped for the rest of the night. They raven-stag let Will curl up against it while it kept watch.

“Happy sailing” Will said to it.

The raven-stag did not answer, and despite being exhausted Will didn’t sleep… couldn’t. He let the breathing of the feathered creature comfort him until the barest shades of light could be seen rising again in the sky.

He realized he’d lost the toy bear and felt a prang inside him, it was Sarah’s bear. It reminded him of their adventures together, but it seemed everything of his old life was being stripped from him. This new life felt more real and alive to him, the old life a far away dream he could not seem to keep hold of out here in the wild.

“Where are we going?” he asked the raven-stag for the fifth time that night.

“Home” it replied

“Where is home?”

“Where the last of our kind congregate to remember the old ways” it said

“What are we?” Will asked

“Our kind are many things, old and new” it replied unhelpfully.

Will sat up and started walking back towards the river, the stag watched him but did not move to follow. Will found a sharp rock and made another spear in much better time that the day before.

With it in hand he waded back into the river and after a drink, stood still in wait for the return of the chittering fish. He was successful much quicker than last time, and this time he had done better work at removing the stuff that ruined the taste of the meat.

It was still raw, but he felt just find for eating it raw and even enjoyed it. He wondered up stream again in search of a large rock to sun himself on, but brought his spear with him this time so as to save time on the next day. When he did find one, he took of his cloths again and spread them out to dry before laying down himself and falling into a blissful haze and then finally sleep.

He woke confused, a strange noise shocking his ears causing him to leap up and cover them. VAVAVAVAVAVAVA! Pieced the air and the sound of dogs and men and the raven-stag in the trees beckoning him to please hurry.

Confused and panicked he left his clothing where it was and took of to the raven-stag as quick as he could. He found himself alert and terrified as the raven-stag lifted its great head and howled, the sound echoed through Wills bone and caused the trees around him to vibrate. Somehow, he knew what the howl meant… it was a call to arms and the world around seemed to be listening.

“What’s happening?” Will shouts above the raw of noise surrounding him.

“The humans have come for you” The raven-stag replied “but this is my domain, we will not let them have you again”

“I *am* human. I *am* one of them… *please* don’t hurt them” Will suddenly begged “I don’t want to get anyone else hurt!”

The raven-stag snorted angrily “This is my domain” it said and then out of the trees came all manner of creatures, some he knew existed, several moose a fox and a black bear.

Others were strange things that looked natural but not. Hares with flowers growing around their ears, large cats with glowing green eyes and mains of red leaves, another raven-stag, this one smaller and with hints of blue in its feathers, a lone dog with blades of grass instead of fur, and an extremely large purple, scale covered moose thing with horns made of corral and a floating sea of Algae upon its back.

Will backed up from it all “is this real?” he asked quietly, and even over the din the raven-stag herd him. “Depends whom you ask” it said

Will unsure of what to do ran as fast as his legs could go away from the crazy-ass army of creatures and over a ridge where he came to another halt. Men in black with large guns and

paint on their faces. Panicked Will threw himself to the ground, could they be here to arrest him?

He knew he'd be in big trouble when he was found of-course, he *did* stab someone… *his own da*.

But this… he didn't know what this was. This couldn't be all for him… Then beside him he became aware of the raven-stag approaching, and he knew with sudden clarity that if the men with guns meet the creatures with horns and teeth who would win.

Chapter Six: Separation Anxiety

Chapter Notes

Thank you David_Dave_Davey for being not just a Beta but a helpful collaborator in the writing of this fic.

Chapter Six: Separation Anxiety

October 16th 1993

Approximately 15 Miles south of the Canadian Boarder

Will rolled away from the ridge and then scampered on hands and knees until he was back beside the raven-stag.

“You have to leave!” he said to it as loudly as he dared, his neck craned back as he stared at the feathers around its face.

It leaned it’s head down so that its snout was beside Will’s head and snorted.

“I do not have to.” It said calmly. “I am Brandubh of the winds of the north. You walk in my realm princeling, under my watch. You are ours and we will not let them have you.”

“I am not yours!” Will yelled at it and faster than he though he could be he sprang up and griped the stag by the horns and used them to seat himself upon its back, and lay his belly upon its neck.

“But maybe you are mine!” he cried out while the creature thrashed about throwing its body about and snarling at him.

“Aodh!” the creature raged “You are not ready to take this right! You are too young still! Let go!” it twisted and turned the muscles on its back rippled but Will found he could hold him self to its back with ease. His body flexed not against, but with the great beast and he found that he knew its movements before it made them.

“Let go!” It cried out again and trashed its back against a tree but Will barely felt it. He knew his skin had broken, knew that his back was damp with his own blood, knew his shirt was torn, but that knowledge was far away. He had to hold on, even if it hurt him so that this great creature would not die.

“No!” he screamed as it ran back to the other creatures who had frozen in place to watch. All of them watched but none made any move to get involved.

Then as suddenly as Will had reached up to grab a hold of it the raven-stag stilled “Foolish child.” it said after a time. “You are our heart; you are what keeps us bound to this world but you are young and reckless.”

“You were saying not long ago that I was clever.” Will pointed out between gasps.

The beast snorted “Thoughtless child. There are consequences for what you have just done! And it cannot be undone.” it lowered his head. “it is done Aodh, as we knew it would be.”

“What is done?” Will asks suddenly unsure… he hadn’t exactly thought about what he was doing, he’d been acting on instinct.

“You have taken your place among your people; you may command us as you wish.” said the raven-stag.

Will dismounted and looked around him and for a moment he almost forgot about the rush he was in. The creatures were all bowing to him… even the raven-stag had inclined its head.

Will shock his head as if to clear it and focused back in on the sounds around him. The helicopters echoing din, the steps of men in the underbrush coming closer as they climbed towards the ridge.

“Go! All of you!” Will said as strongly as he could “Don’t let them see you.”

Then before he could even blink, they were gone, swifter than even he could move. The bear lingered the longest before it lumbered of at a quick gallop and disappeared from view.

Will stood, suddenly alone and was aware of the footsteps nearing the ridge. He turned to face them trying to be brave. But when he saw them up close, appearing as a group, clad in black with helmets and guns and boots, he panicked and ran.

All that sureness he had felt earlier when he had leaped upon the raven-stag had left him.

He ran back towards the river with out thinking and a hunk of lose earth and stones gave way sending him tumbling down. He put out his hands but could not stop his descent as any ground he tried to hold onto crumbled under him.

He came to a stop with a hard thump against a tree and fumbled his way back to his feet to find a group of men with their guns raised and pointed at him. He put his hands up and froze as they approached him.

He could hear the others carefully making their way down the bank behind him. There was talking on radios and at a distance the barking of dogs “Find, find, find,” they called to each other. One of the helicopters swooped near by and Will ducked down. There was shouting and even more men appeared and Will couldn’t make sense of it all… it was too loud and busy and confusing.

Then someone grabbed him and he was face down in the dirt and his wrists were wrenched painfully behind his back and bound tightly. Then he was lifted up and slung over someone's back and he was not in his body any longer. He was above it all. Floating with out feeling… watching from afar. He was smaller than he realised compared to the men surrounding him. He looked tiny and feeble and stupid. He felt it was a bit strange that he could see the tops of the men's helmets as they moved through the trees.

It was a strange feeling but he was glad of it. Better to be floating above it all than down their in his body. It was easier this way.

"What?!" Jack all but shouted into his phone "Why weren't we told!?"

Jack held up his hand when Ed went to interrupt him.

"Okay, Well tell Davis he'd better have a good explanation for this!" Jack said angrily and hang up on who ever it was, sighing in frustration.

He looked at Ed who was barely keeping himself in check "They have him, have had him for a few hours now. They're taking him by helicopter back to the academy in Baltimore, he'll be there soon."

Ed was torn between relief and anger "Why would they do that?" he asked.

"I can only guess, Davis' orders"

Ed's face became strangely empty "He can't just take my kid!" he seethed.

"We don't know what his intentions are yet… lets just take a moment, then get on our way." Jack didn't need to say where, Ed knew they had to get to Will as fast as they could.

Will was in pain. Facedown a black hood had been placed over his head so that he could not see anything. His wrists tied painfully behind his back. The noise of the helicopter was unbearable, and at some point, on his journey with out even realising it he had wet himself.

He was aware of being surrounded on both sides by men in boots, if he rolled to far from one side to another he was pushed back down by an unforgiving foot.

His body shuddered in time with the helicopter, his teeth hurt where he had clenched them in pain. He was crying, the tears tickled his cheeks as they rolled on down and wet the hood.

His nose was running as well. He was spilling out of himself upon the helicopter floor, melting from the inside out and no one noticed. No one cared.

They had stopped once but only for a half-an-hour about. No one would talk to Will when he tried to ask where they were going. Or when he begged them to undo his wrists which had gone past numb and into a painful throb.

His da wouldn't have let this happen to him. His da would have stopped them. If only he hadn't stabbed him.

When they landed a second time he was picked up and put on his feet. His arms were grabbed and he was led to a waiting car. He was seated between two men who also refused to talk to him. His wrists were even more uncomfortable wedged as they were between himself and the seat.

When they parked, he was taken without any consideration for his size up a series of concrete stairs and into an echoey building. From there they travelled down several halls and into a room. The hood was ripped off his head and his eyes burned from the sudden influx of light. He tried to cover his eyes but couldn't; his hands still trapped as they were.

He found the corner of the room and rested his head there with his eyes closed. Letting them slowly get used to the bright light now gleaning down at him. Once they had adjusted, he turned and looked around the room. There was a large mirror covering one of the walls, a table and several chairs in centre of the room and a large door which Will knew was locked.

The lights above him flicked something awful. There was snot on his face that had dried, it itched but he could not stretch it away. His legs were wet and itchy. Everything felt wrong. Everything hurt. He cried and shook and found some comfort in forming a rhythm of swaying side to side, from one foot to the other.

Ed sat stiffly in Jacks car as they headed back to Baltimore as quickly as they could without breaking the law. Not that Ed wouldn't have been perfectly content to break it a thousand times if it meant getting to Will quicker but he felt that if they got stopped for speeding it would only slow them down, and potently give Davis some ammo against them. He needed to be above reproach.

At the gas station they stopped to full up, Jack called his people in Baltimore to check on things while Ed filled the car up and brought them both some snacks that he'd not paid much mind to, only grabbing and brought and went back to the car to wait.

When Jack came back and sat back in the driver's seat, he looked grim "My people have been locked out. Whatever he's doing he doesn't want me interfering."

"Lets just go." Ed said

Jack started up the engine and pulled out “We’ll get there as soon as possible.” he said with a glance Ed’s way.

Ed didn’t reply. “Listen I know you’re scared...” Jack tried again.

“Damn right I’m scared! I’m terrified!” Ed snapped

“But you can trust that however things might seem Davis is one of the good ones. He won’t let anything happen to Will.” Jack continued unperturbed by Ed’s comment.

“I hope your right, for Davis’ sake.” Ed replied.

No one came in for a long time and Will was exhausted by the time the door opened. A man with a kind face who looked to be older than his da came in.

“Hello young man, you must be Will.” Davis said.

Will stared at him.

“They left you with your hands like that!” he said with a frown “Jenkins get something to cut those off right away.” he said to another man standing in the door way who nodded and left.

Davis approached the table “I’ve brought you something to eat and drink.” he said and put a can of Coke and packaged sandwich on the table “I’m sorry you had to wait so long, if I’d known the state you were in, I’d have gotten here sooner”

A man came in and handed Davis some snippers and left. The door shut behind him this time and Will heard the lock click.

“Come-on over here son and I’ll take those things off for you.” Davis said gently.

Slowly Will made his way over to the man.

“My names Davis, I work with your Uncle Jack.” He said “Turn around now, you’re all-right”

Will turned, hoping the man didn’t take too much notice of the state of his pants, and there were two snips and his hands wrists were free. Will moved away again with his hands held up gingerly in front of him, they really hurt now.

“They’ll be fine again in some time.” Davis said and sat down. “Why don’t you sit down and have some food; I expect you’re hungry.”

Will perched himself on the edge of the chair and Davis pushed the sandwich and across the table to him. Will with fumbling hands managed to take the plastic wrapper of and began to

eat. Davis opened the can of Coke and pushed that across also. Will ate and sipped and glanced at Davis but was starting to feel things might start to get better now.

“So Will, I’ve heard so much about you from Jack and Bella. All good things as well, so I’m a bit curious as to why you’d run away?”

Will stopped eating and looked down at the table beginning to cry anew “Because I…” he gulped and fell silent again, the words kept getting stuck in his mouth.

“Hey, hey.” Davis said with his hands up to placate “You’re ok now Will, I’m on your side. If you’re not happy with Ed Graham, you can live with someone else.” Davis suggested.

“No!” Will said suddenly, loudly “Please!”

“Okay then, I take it you’re happy with Ed?”

Will nods emphatically.

“Then can you tell me why you ran away?” Davis asks

“It’s all my fault” Will said his eyes on the table “I didn’t mean to… I didn’t mean to hurt him”

Davis shifted in his seat “Who Will?”

Will didn’t reply.

“Listen son, I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me. This is very important, who did you hurt?” Davis asked seriously.

“My Da” Will says heavily.

Davis leaned back in his chair a bit “I don’t know what you think you’ve done Will, but last I talked to Jack your dad was fine, worried to all hell about you, but fine.”

Will looked up at Davis with large blue eyes and tear stained checks “Really?” he askes in a small hopeful voice.

“Really.” Davis replies. “But maybe you could tell me what happened?”

Will nods “We got in a fight and… I just sort of lost it and stabbed him in the arm and then I freaked out, since I knew I’d hurt him so I ran away”

Davis sighed deeply “Why don’t you finish your sandwich and I’ll go find out how your dad is”

“Thank you, sir,” Will says quietly.

“That’s ok son, any time” Then Davis was banging on the door and being let out and Will was alone again.

Chapter Seven: Just a Foot Soldier

Chapter Seven

Just a Foot Soldier

October 17th 1993

Baltimore, Maryland

It was the next morning when Jack and Ed reached Baltimore. Their first stop was to Jack's home to fill in Bella, freshen up, and have a quick bite to eat. They also used the time to collect their tired thoughts. Bella sent them on their way with firm words to Jack to sort it out quickly.

They drove over in silence, each man inside his own head, dwelling on the future. Their silence continued when they arrived and walked the steps at the entrance of the building.

Inside they are greeted by several guards dressed in black gear who asked them who they were.

"Jack Crawford," Jack says, "this is Ed Graham, we're here to see Davis."

"A moment sir." one of the men said and lifted his hand-held radio to his mouth, squeak fuzz "A Jack Crawford and Ed Graham to see Davis." squeak fuzz.

Squeak Fuzz "Send them through." squeak fuzz.

Both men move out of their way "this way." they say, so well trained there're almost synced.

Jack ignores them; he knows his way around his own damn building. Jack finds Davis in his office sitting behind his desk reading over some files. Davis gestures for them to take a seat and they do, then he makes them wait.

Jack knows why Davis was doing it, he liked to make people wait as a show of power. Doing it seated in Jacks own chair in Jacks own office went past irritation for Jack and into the realm of bitter amusement. After all this time, and everything they'd done, Davis still thought he could play games with him…

Ed, it proved was too impatient and either didn't know the game or just didn't care to play it. "You must be Davis." Ed interrupted the silence.

Davis held up his hand to ask for silence without even bothering to look up. It was distinctly clear that Davis had never meet Ed Graham.

“I’ll take that as a yes you bastard.” Ed stood then, grabbed for the file in Davis’ hand and ripped it away “What are you wasting my time reading anyway?” He skims the file while Davis stares at him momentarily surprised, the game wasn’t going how it normally went.

Ed did have the habit of ignoring the game all together. Watching Davis flounder even for a second was totally worth any of Davis’ scolding’s he’d no doubt have to sit through later.

“What the hell is this!” Ed says angrily “like you haven’t had the time to read this while we’ve been on our way here!”

“That’s classified.” Davis says quietly.

Jack eyes Davis; he knows how to tell when someone has managed to especially anger the other man. It was always fun when it wasn’t him. Less fun when it was Ed who had attracted Davis’ ire.

“Not for me it isn’t, just so you’re clear, when it comes to my son nothing is classified you self-assured arsewipe. Now where is my son!”

Davis actually manages to surprise Jack; the man laughs. Though Jack could see he wasn’t amused “Now I see why Jack likes you so much, the last man who talked to me like that is dead of course, bit of a cautionary tale but still, and you even have an inkling of who I am, must have balls of steel considering…”

“WHERE IS WILL?!” Ed yells desperately, unapertured by Davis words.

“*Considering* I hold your boy’s life in my hot little hands.” Davis finishes.

Jack shifts uncomfortable in his seat; he didn’t know what he’d do if Davis actually did intend to hurt Will. He’d like to think he’d be brave enough to stop it… no, he knew he’d do something, anything to protect his family and for better or worse Will was part of his messy little family.

Ed looks truly murderous so Jack stands up and steps next to the irate man. “Davis is just posturing,” he eyes his old mentor coldly “Aren’t you Davis.”

Davis returns his stare with distain “Sit down, both of you. I have some questions for you before you see the boy.”

Jack grips Ed’s arm and part pulls the man back into his seat.

“Well?” Ed asks impatiently “ask.”

Jack winces.

“Will seems to be of the belief that he stabbed you.” Davis says.

“That a question or a statement?” Ed asks.

“Did. Will. Stab. you?” Davis asks and rolls his eyes at Jack as if they are on the same side.

Ed looks between them for a moment “What of it?”

Jack looks at Ed now in surprise “What? Will didn’t actually stab you?”

“Just a little bit…” Ed remarks.

“Oh, just a little bit?” Jack is starting to get angry, being out of the loop is not helpful when you’re trying to be helpful.

“With a pencil...” Ed continues on.

Jack relaxes a bit then and snorts “why aren’t I surprised?”

“And it wasn’t just him at fault, I made mistakes as well… the blame is equal.” Ed supplied.

“Expensive mistakes,” Davis comments “and dangerous for you, for me, for Jack.”

Ed nods “I understand that, and I’m happy to talk about it round in circles all you want, I just want to see Will. Then I’ll hop, skip and jump through whatever fucking hoops you want me to… sound fair?”

Jack cringes inside, Ed has made himself a powerful enemy.

“And I understand that you are worried and because of that I’m willing to overlook your flippantness. But though you’ve raised him so far doesn’t mean you have the rights of a parent. Will isn’t yours…”

“Well, he sure as hell isn’t yours!” Ed snaps. “The way I see it, he’s some kid you saved in a moment of guilt that has now become a lose end! Which isn’t his fault. Will is a child, a human being, and I won’t let you treat him as anything less!”

Jack could see that the conversation was going nowhere. It defiantly wasn’t hurrying them on their way to see Will. In fact, whether Ed knew it or not he could be on a collision course with the risk of never seeing Will again.

Jack would not let that be the outcome. “Enough,” he says “That’s enough.”

Ed looks his way with furious eyes and a small shake in his body which Jack knows is stress and fatigue. It’d been a long week.

“This isn’t helping anything.” Jack says trying to sound calming and finding he wasn’t sure how to. But gave it his best shot anyway. “Let’s just do what Davis asks, then we can see Will.” he says imploringly.

Ed sighs and rubs his hands through his hair and over his face. He looks to have aged ten years in the space of days. For the first time Jack notices grey in the short red hair, splattering along Ed’s temples. Wrinkles appearing around the man’s eyes, frown lines on his forehead. Fatherhood he supposes was something of a catalyst for ageing.

Ed remains silent, and Jack supposes that is as much of an agreement that he'll get. Davis is watching the two of them blank faced.

"If you want to ask questions ask." Jack says to Davis sharply.

Davis looks at Ed "when Will stabbed you with the pencil did it break the skin?"

Ed shakes his head, a bemused expression on his face "yeah." he says.

"How sharp was it when he stabbed you with it?" Davis asks

Ed shakes his head "normal… pencil sharpness?"

Davis nods in thought, "we'll get one our doctors to take a look at it. Some of our other guys might also come in and take a look while there're at it."

"Is that all?" Ed asks tentatively.

Davis eyed him "I'd like to hear your version of events and then like I said I'd like my people to take a look at where you were stabbed. Wills asleep right now, and we have some questions for him as well, but after that's all done, I suppose we'll let you see him."

Davis had come back and told him his da was here to see him, but first some things had to be sorted. A nice lady took him and gave him a clean change of clothing and told him to have a shower. He did, and felt a lot better to be out of his soiled clothing, especially his trousers which had become unbearably itchy. They put his old cloths in a plastic bag and took them away and he was taken to what looked like a doctor's office.

He'd never been to a doctor before; he'd seen what they were meant to be like on tv but it was still a little strange and new. He put up with the check up as well as he could, only half present as they poked at him.

He wanted to get it all done so he could see his da. Tell him how sorry he was. Promise to never hurt him again and plead to come home again.

After all of that he was finally taken to a room with a desk and a bed, given a meal, and then sent to bed. As tired as he was, it took a long time to fall to sleep. When he did there were hands grabbing at him and feet stomping at him. His da shouting at him, telling him to go away.

He woke up sobbing and alone, shivering even though he wasn't cold.

When another lady came in with breakfast and a fresh change of clothes, he found himself going through the motions, with a numbness that had settled through his body. He was taken

for a second check-up. This time they used a needle to draw blood, he didn't like it. But he could only watch from far away as the vials filled one by one with his blood.

His blood didn't like being trapped in something so dead he decided. Glass was a cruel container for life seeking to burst forth. trapped, contained. A cage for something sacred, it was wrong he decided. He could hear it humming at him from across the room. he had to keep himself from giving chase if only to smash the vile and watch it roll into the cracks and crevices' on the ground.

"This is taking too long." Ed grumbles. He receives no reply from those around him.

Jack was somewhere else yelling at Davis he suspected. He'd give better than he got he hoped.

They'd removed his hastily applied bandage, and had since looked over the wound like it might hold some hidden secrets. He supposed it was lucky they did, they'd removed some splinters of wood and pencil lead that had broken off where it'd struck bone.

Ed wasn't stupid, he knew that maybe an eight-year-old child shouldn't have been able to do that. But he just couldn't care. It didn't matter, he'd be happily stabbed with a thousand pencils if Will could come home safely with him.

His kid was somewhere in this building, he didn't know where. Probably upset, almost definitely thinking this whole mess was all his fault. Young as he was, he'd be too busy focusing on all the wrong parts of things. He wouldn't realize where the true danger lay with out Ed there to point it out to him. He was vulnerable and alone, while Ed was being kept maddingly separate.

"When can I see my son?" he asks with annoyance to the room.

"You only need one stitch," the doctor in the group says "the others are finished; this is some numbing" he places some cream on Ed's arm then goes to a cupboard above one of the benches and begins setting what he'd need on a tray. The others are talking amongst them selves in hushed voices, tidying and heading off one at a time.

"When can I see my son?" Ed repeats as the doctor comes over and threads his needle.

"I'm sorry sir, that's not my area," The doctor replies patiently "I need you to hold still." he adds and begins stitching the single required stitch, despite the numbing it still feels sharp.

"That's everyone's excuse," Ed says letting anger leak into his voice "Where's Jack then, he's been gone a fair while now."

"Also, not my area." The doctor is staying annoyingly calm. Now Ed knows how it feels when he does it to Jack.

“Then what is your area!” Ed snaps.

“What I just did to your arm, my area. Anything else you want or need, not my area.” he says not even bothering to look back at Ed who scowls.

“Snarky Fucker.” Ed snarls none too quietly.

“Is your shoulder fixed?” The doctor asks.

“Don’t care. Fixed, not fixed I never gave a flying fuck, the only thing I care about right now is Will.”

The doctor looks at him from across the room where he had been fiddling with something out of sight “Then you’ll be comforted to know he’s why where’re all here.”

“Not even a bit.” Ed whispers to himself.

Will was back in the mirror room when Davis came back in with a man.

“Will this is Dr. Allen, he’s going to give you a test to pass. If you do well enough at it, you’ll get to see your dad. How would you like that?”

Will nods, his brow creased “What kind of test?” he asks

“A bit like a school test, how does that sound?” Davis says.

Will looked relived “good.” he says and goes to sit down at the table.

“Good, I’ll leave you two to it then.” Davis says.

The test took a lot longer than Will thought it would. They didn’t finish that day, and spent most of the next day doing it as well. It was not like a school test in Will’s opinion, more like a series of all sorts of different ones. Each one starting out easy and slowly became more interesting. He’d been disappointed it took so long, he really wanted to see his da. But hopefully he’d passed the test, he felt like he had, and then everything would be good again.

Dr. Allen had kept saying ‘well done!’ excitably so he figured he had. When he wasn’t with Dr. Allen in the mirror room he was doing other test’s that he also had to pass.

Running as fast as he could.

Running for as long as he could.

Jumping as far as he could.

Eye site test, hearing test…

After a while they'd all blurred into a building agitation.

Ed had been put in a room, where he'd received food three times a day but other than that had been left to himself. His door was locked and he had no way to contact Jack to find out what the fuck was going on.

He'd gone from rage-filled to hopeless to rage-filled again so many times he'd lost count.

He'd paced and sat and paced again.

He'd managed to fall asleep a few fitful times to only be meet with nightmares. The sort he hadn't had to deal with for some years, long dealt with reemerging from the innermost confides of his memory's and mingling in with his fears for Will. He felt like his body was slowly crumbling away with his sanity trying desperately not to follow. He couldn't bring him self to have a single shower, could barely eat, but made himself for Will. If they ever got out of here his son would need him.

So he chewed mechanically on his chalk tasting food. He paced a bit and chewed some more and waited.

"Go back in there and demand that Davis lets them both go!" Bella says again.

"I've tried that, there's nothing I can do. We just have to wait; Davis has promised he'll let them go tonight."

"And if he doesn't?" Bella asks and pushes her barely touched plate of food away.

"Then I'll do what I have to. I'll get them both out of there," Jack says "but you should know, all of this." he gestures at their surroundings. Their large modern house tastefully decorated, their two expensive cars. Their life with out any financial worries "would be taken from us, we'd be poor and in hiding." he says seriously.

"Then we'll be poor and in hiding," Bella says with determination on her face "I have a cousin in Canada."

“Shouldn’t come to that.” Jack says as much to comfort himself as Bella, he really didn’t like *that* cousin "Davis is a man of his word, if he says he'll let them out tonight then he will."

Will was brought back to the mirror room by two men. Davis was already there, sitting at the table reading a file.

Will deciding not to disturb him sits on the other chair and waited.

He had been slowly gaining back awareness in the last few days. The hollowness was being replaced by torrents of feelings he didn’t understand. He wasn’t the same Will of last week. He wasn’t sure he even knew who he was any more. Couldn’t recognize his own thoughts or feelings, didn’t think his face in the mirror matched his insides.

For now though, he knew what he had to do. What ever he was told. What ever that was.

Then he’d see his da and everything would be ok again.

Davis just kept reading and reading and reading and Will fidgeted and waited and waited.

“Is my da ok?” Will asks when his patience finds its end.

Davis pauses “Just a moment Will, I’ll be with you shortly.”

Will nods and rubs his hands back and forth on his new strange, not-his trousers. They smell new and are a little too stiff. His da always tried to find him soft track pants, so they’d be less of a distraction. His da thought of a lot of things, small things mostly, but they all made his life better.

“Sir?” He asks Davis holds up his hand.

“I’ve done all the tests. Everything you asked me to. I just want to see my Da…. Please…I … I did pass?” he asks suddenly afraid he hadn’t passed one of the tests. If he had failed, would he ever see his da again? Would he go to kids jail for stabbing his da with the pencil?

Davis sighs and puts aside the folder “you passed.” he says.

Will is relieved for a moment and then remembers his da “Is my da ok?”

“Your dad is fine.” Davis answers

“Can I see him now?” Will asks still nervous that after everything he’ll still not be able to see him.

“Not yet.” Davis says, he’s a lot more terse with Will this time and Will is almost tempted to look, so he has a gauge of his chances but his da’s voice is in his head warning him to be

careful.

“But I did everything you asked me to!” Will scowls.

“You did.” Davis says.

“But I’m in trouble, aren’t I?” Will says

“Hmmmmm, your eight now?”

“Eight and a half.” Will nods.

“Why’d you stab your dad?”

Wills face crumples “I didn’t mean to.” he says quietly.

“It doesn’t look that way.”

Will sits forward a bit “why don’t you believe me?” he asks

“Do you know what sort of force would be needed to stab a man with a pencil and break the skin and then fat and muscle under before hitting into the bone?”

“No?” Will says rubbing his legs and a faster pace, trying to keep calm, trying to not feel the terrible building guilt.

“A lot,” Davis supplies “you’d have to have been trying… you’d have to have meant it.”

“I didn’t mean it,” Will says quietly, then more loudly “I know I didn’t, it sort of just happened. I know I’d never mean to hurt him. I love my da… Please, please let me see him. I have to tell him I’m sorry.” Will Begged.

Davis stares at him appraisingly “You’ll get to see him soon, right after I’ve finished asking you some questions… how’s that sound?”

“Good. Thank you.” Will replies relieved.

“Then we’re in agreement.” Davis says and picks up the folder again, flicking again through the sheets “I understand you’re a very bright boy, ahead academically by two years but capable of much more, held back by your dad because of a girl?”

Will shrugs “My da wanted me to have a friend my age. I help her, she helps me.”

“Does it ever frustrate you being held back like that?”

“Not really.”

“So, you’re not feeling bored in school?”

Will shakes his head “no, there’s always so much happening at school. Too much to ever be bored.”

“And this friend of yours,” He checked something in his folder “Sarah Baker… how’s that going?”

Will shrugs “ok.”

“No arguing?” Will looks down at his hands and fidgets.

“Will?”

“A bit.” Will replies.

“That must be hard?” Davis observes everything, has learnt Will’s habit of fiddling or looking at something bland intensely when he’s anxious.

“Arguments are a normal part of any relationships, there’s always going to be some storms. Not everything in life is smooth sailing.” Will says.

“Your Dad tell you that?”

“Yeah.”

“Any storms lately?”

“Yeah.”

“What happened?”

Will scowls “she’s always wanting me to do things I don’t want to.”

“Not a nice feeling? Pressure like that?”

“No, I *hate* it.”

“And how do you respond normally when she peruses you?”

“I run away.”

“And does she ever try to follow?”

Will nods “but I’m way faster than her.”

“I’m sure you are… Was your dad putting pressure on you when you stabbed him?”

“Yeah.”

“What was it about?”

“He always takes Sarah’s side.” Will said sulkily.

Davis hums in sympathy “That must be hard, he is meant to be your dad.”

“It is, but he thinks me fitting in is more important than me being right. Even if I am right, but I think if I’m right then I’m right and she shouldn’t try to make me do things I don’t want to.”

“What does she want you to do?” Davis asks.

“Look at her eyes.” Will says and begins to sweep his fingertips across the smooth surface of the table. He doesn’t know why, but it helps. Back and forth, back and forth, he’s ok.

“Yes, I noticed you find that difficult, can you tell me why?”

Will shrugs “eyes are just too much.”

“But your dad wants you to anyway?”

Will nods “just Sarah though, since she is my friend, he thinks I owe her that much.”

“But you would rather run away from her?” Davis asks eyes sweeping over Will’s face and the subtle sweep of frowns that flitter over his face. Will bows his head and remains quiet and Davis does also.

It’s Will who breaks the silence “why is there a mirror?”

“Its only a mirror on our side, we can’t see out but people can see in.”

“People can watch us but we can’t watch them?” Will asks looking at it with more interest.

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Is my da there?”

“No.”

“Uncle Jack?”

“Yes, He’s very protective of you.” Davis lets his eyes sweep the mirror while Will gives a small smile to it, he hopes his uncle can see it. He hopes he worries a little less.

“I know.” he says.

“Gave him a hell of a scare running away like you did” Davis says and looks through the folder again.

“Sorry,” Will says with hunched shoulders “I won’t ever do it again.”

“Don’t say sorry to me, it’s no skin off my back. But your uncle, aunt and dad have been worried sick about you.”

“I know.” Will’s voice is small, there is a small quiver to it, as if he is just managing to hold back tears.

“Do you look at their eyes? your dads and uncle's and aunts?”

Will nods “Sometimes, I know them well so I’m familiar with their eyes.”

“Hmmmmm. So maybe in a few more years you would feel comfortable enough with Sarah to look at her eyes as well?”

Will thinks about it for a moment and nods “probably.”

“Then I’m sorry that you’ll never get the chance. You won’t ever see her again.” Davis says in the same sort of voice he’d used for the whole conversation.

Even though this was the punch line. Had always been. It was no joke for Will, but Davis is happy with himself.

“Actions have consequences young man; you stabbed your dad and ran away. Now you can never go back to Farmington, you’ll have to start again somewhere else. all. Over. Again.”

Will lowers his head onto his arms on the table and begins to cry, his shoulders quiver and his body shakes.

Davis is satisfied and leaves shutting the door firmly behind him.

Jack takes some deep calming breaths. He has to stay cool. He watches Davis as he approaches.

“Kid knows how to throw a tantrum to remember.” Jack comments trying to ignore the pain in his chest seeing Will like this, a small quivering creature. Hurt.

Davis raises his eyebrows at him “This had better be the last tantrum, if you lot can’t control him, I can’t guarantee his safety.”

“Will’s normally the best-behaved kid I know.” Jack says slowly, Trying not to appear too desperate.

“Except for when he’s not. He can’t be allowed to run off like that, missing kids cause a stir that’s hard to cover up. And that friend of yours is another problem on his own, he’d destroy heaven and earth to protect that boy.”

“He won’t be a problem; he listens to me,” Jack says “He and I have a history.”

Davis snorts “that’s the only reason he’s still alive. Because I have faith in your ability to control him.”

Jack scrutinizes the man next to him “you’d really kill the kid after everything we’ve done to protect him?”

The man snorts “wouldn’t kill him as such, but it’d be kinder if I did.”

Jack tries to calm his beating heart “A fate worse than death.” Jack says.

“For a time at least. I think I know what they were making.” Davis adds.

Jack raises his eye brows at the man and gestures for him to continue.

“Kids stronger, faster, smarter than any kid his age ought to be, he’s a…”

“Soldier’s.” Jack supplies

Davis nods “he’s a solider.”

“you’re sure?” Jack says eyeing Will’s small form hunched over and though he is no longer shaking he is clearly still crying.

“Kid ever been sick?” Davis asks

Jack frowns “he’s got a good immune system.”

“I’d say he has a superior immune system, and that’s not all.”

Jack feels fear shiver its way thought his body. It’s a strange sickness that slides it's way down to his legs making them seem less sturdy, shaky.

“When we found him, his shirt was torn and covered in blood at the back. But by the time we got him back here there was barely a scratch left on the boy.” Davis says.

“And you’re sure it was his blood.”

“Positive.”

“Is this going to be a problem?” Jack asks watching Davis’ face for any sign it would.

“Actually, it’s good news for you”. Davis says and Jack does not miss the hint of bitterness in his voice.

“I don’t understand…” Jack says with a frown.

“Kids faster than he should be for sure, he runs like an Olympic athlete at eight, and that has it’s uses sure but he’s hardly the flash. He’s stronger as well, but wouldn’t be able to beat you or I in an arm wrestle, would put up a good fight sure, but that’s nothing on its own that’d change the world.” He turned and leaned on the hand rail “He’s smarter than he should be, in certain areas a *lot* smarter, but that’s not unheard of, there are plenty of other’s just as gifted.”

Jack nods “just a foot soldier not a super hero.”

Davis inclines his head “don’t get me wrong, an army of Will’s would be a formidable thing to behold, terrifying even for our enemy’s. But we don’t even know how they made him. One of him on his own shouldn’t cause a stir, foot soldiers don’t win wars.”

“Then what does?” Jack asks

Davis snorted “you should know that by now, knowledge is power.”

“You were hoping he’d be like the informant?” Jack asks with sudden clarity.

“I was,” Davis says “As he is, if he were ever discovered, he shouldn’t matter enough to be worth the hassle it’d cause.”

“What about his healing? Immune system?” Jack asks

“Worth billions of course, if it could be bottled and sold. But it can’t. Will was engineered that way before he had even formed. So, unless there was an affordable way to do that to a child before they were born, its just not feasible.” He looks at Jack who is trying to not look so relived. “That’s if we could even work out how in the first place. They made sure there wasn’t the slightest clue left. We still have no idea how they were doing it.”

Jack considers the situation as a whole for a moment then nods to himself “So we’re safe?”

“Unless there’s something else you want to tell me?”

Jack forces his face to not react to his thoughts of bears and shakes his head “not that I can think of.”

He looks back thought the glass at his nephew, and hopes that there would be no more surprises. No other hidden ability’s that might change the situation for the worse.

Davis is looking at him carefully, no doubt searching for any signs of deception.

“If you do think of anything don’t hesitate to contact me… until then change their last names and move them again.” Davis says.

“And keep hoping that no one finds out what we did.” Jack adds.

“For now,” Davis replies Jack raises his eye brows and gives Davis an enquiring stare.

There was a click at the door and Will pears up over the top of his arms to see who was coming in now.

His da walks in, looking tired and messy, but it's him.

Will stands hesitantly and looks at the ground “I’m really sorry that I hurt you.” he says hesitating to move towards his da just yet.

“Oh son.” Ed says in a rasping voice and rushes over to Will and scoops him up into his arms “I’m so sorry as well.”

Will melts into his arms and starts to cry anew, the horrible scratchy sobs of some one who has cried too much for too long.

Ed rocks him back and forth like he used to when Will was just a baby.

There had been times when Kate hadn’t known what to do with Will. He’d be inconsolable for some unknown reason and she’d only manage to make it worse. He suspected now it was Will’s gift. He’d have *seen* his mom’s frustration with him, would have found that overwhelming. Ed would come home to a very stressed wife and Will in a right state. So, he’d take him in his arms and walk back and forth rocking him. It always worked. Kate had hated how easy it was for him. He found it wasn't easy this time, it hurt to hold his son's shacking body. To feel it quiver and shake. To hear his quite sobs. It reached inside of him and ripped and gutted him.

“Its all done with now. It’s going to be ok; you’ll see.” Ed says and stands up still clutching Will tightly, and carries him out. Away.

Chapter Eight: Ghosts

Chapter Summary

> Yep. A bit dramatic again. Sorry a bit. Warning for this chapter is mentions of terrible things.

Chapter Eight

Ghosts

November 8th 1995

Out-skirts of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Winter in New Orleans was different from what he'd been used to. Different not better or worse. The summers could be sweltering but Will found that hot weather didn't affect him any more than the cold. His da having grown up here, preferred it.

They lived on the outskirts of New Orleans in a small rented flat paid for by his uncle Jack. His da paid for the rent on a small boat shed where he fixed boat motors for a living.

Will found he liked it more than he thought he would when they'd first arrived, bedraggled from a hurried escape from Baltimore. He'd been afraid of it all then, a new place, a new life. Tossed about yet again by forces he still didn't fully understand.

Will enjoyed losing himself along the cannels and tributaries. Listening to the birds twittering to each other about where the best food was and shrinking in alarm whenever a perceived danger was near. The fish chittered less here than they had in the north, they were slower here somehow, less excitable, happier to amble about quietly unless panicked by the local gators with their gaping resting mouths. They were not like any fish he'd heard before but Will found he liked them, preferred them even.

The water was a comfort as it always had been. Sometimes on weekend's when his da would fish he'd take of his shirt and dive into the dark waters. Relishing the gentleness of the waters on calm days. His da let him with out a blink of an eye.

He'd sneak some whispered talked with some of the local wildlife when his da wasn't looking. The gators deferred to him like most creatures. Since the raven-stag even more so. If it wasn't so wrong, he could simply tell a fish to bite his da's hook and it would. But his da liked the fishing even more than the catching. And He liked to think his da would be pleased with his decisions, even if he kept them a secret from him.

Ed trusted him in the wilder places, wasn't afraid for him. He knew Will and nature got on better than Will and people. Seemed to think the biggest danger lay in the hands of people.

Despite his father's fears Will found he liked the people here as well. Liked their accents and way of moving about their world. Liked it when they went into the city with the taste of salt in the air and the sound of jazz wafting through the sky like ribbons of jolting color curling their way into his ears and brain. Liked the strait lines and blank lamps lining the streets with so much order as to counteract the dizzying twisting joy of the place.

He didn't make any friends his own age and his da stopped his nagging since he told him stories of his real/not real friend and since Sarah… he didn't pressure him so much anymore. What was the point? He was always waiting for the inevitable move where he'd have to learn a new place all over.

After his da once again argued into letting Will stay with his peers the past year in New Orleans, the new teacher that he had from November had just sorta gone with the flow of it. Accepted Will as part of his class without reservations, was even enthusiastic about having him. Which was a strange and marvelous feeling that Will had grasped onto so tightly he feared moving on to yet another teacher when he had to come September the following year. And then life threw him another wave to unsettle his boat's mooring. He was again shakily unsteady, fumbling to stay upright. Blindly trying to survive another storm and realizing he couldn't do it on his own. He'd have to go to his da, and then… then they'd have to go to his uncle Jack.

The joy found in New Orleans had been fleeting, but Will had long since learned that nothing good ever lasted.

Will found his da in their boat shed working, jazz blearing from the stereo in the corner. Ed does a double take as he approaches, considering him.

"Can I help?" Will asks.

"Sure," Ed says and points at his work bench "pass me that wrench, will you?"

Will goes to the stereo first and pushes pause on the tape before he grabs the wrench and brings it back to his da.

"What type of motor is this then?" Ed asks.

Will rolls his eyes "two stock outboard motor."

"Too easy ha?" Ed says with a chuckle "What's this then?" He points again but this time at a smaller portion of the motor.

“Piston.” Will says.

“Want to tell me why you’re not in school?” Ee asks and points above the piston.”

“Spark plug.” Will says Ed raises his eye brows, looking intently at his son.

Will turns and looks out at the water “I haven’t been all week, I’ve been thinking. Da I don’t like it there anymore…”

“We all have to do things we don’t like son; our lives are full of them. But we do them, because it’s normally the hard things; work, school,” he joins Will looking out at the water “Raising kids that end up being the things can of often do contribute the best things to our lives”

“Should have told mom that.” Will comments.

“As it so happens your mom did know that. She just didn’t have the guts to live by it, and where ever she is now I bet she regrets it. I’m just happy I did have the guts.”

“You put in the hard work.”

“And I reaped the rewards.” Ed smiles at him.

Will frowns at his smile “Am I the reason she left?” he asks.

Ed snorts “you really don’t want to talk about school?” he turns and goes back to the motor “what’s that?”

Will turns back also seeing where his da is pointing “Exhaust.” He replies.

“I’ve been wondering for a while, why did she go?” Will asks then.

“Nothing to do with you. What’s it do?” Ed continues on.

“Then why?”

“You’re not going to let this go?” Ed asks tiredly.

Will Shakes his head “no.”

“Then here’s the deal son, I tell you what happened with your mom, you tell me why you’ve been skipping school. Quid pro quo, deal?”

Will nods, feeling like he’s secretly won, he was always planning to tell his da what he’d found out about at school “deal.” He says.

“Get me a beer.” Ed says and cleans his hands on an oil-stained cloth before sitting down on one of the rusty old fold-out chairs that over looked their little dock.

Will returns with a beer for his da and a can of Pepsi for himself and sat down in the second chair. For a time that sat in silence listening to the water lapping against the wood. An

anhinga was sunning it self on a log across the way, seemingly unbothered by the presence of people. Its long neck reaching up regally into the sky. Its wings spread to dry, shiny in the sun.

“I meet Kate here; in New Orleans you know. Back then I was a little lost. Thought rightly or wrongly that I’d find myself in her. It wasn’t that long ago but I’m changed now, so much older,” He pulled the tab back on his drink and took a sip. “I thought she was the one and asked her to marry me just weeks after we meet… She said no of course, had some reason to her. Was a tad more sensible than your old da back then.”

Ed takes another swig and Will stays quiet, not wishing to risk commenting in case his da stops talking. “But I grew on her, she said I had a way about me she liked, and I liked everything about her. We were married within the year. Your uncle Jack was my best man, your aunt was Kates’s maid of honor, since she had no family left of her own and all her friends didn’t approve of me.” Ed tipped back the rest of his drink then leaned forward to place the empty can next to his chair.

“I hope your taking note of how much detail I’m giving you.”

“Yep.” Will replies.

“I’ll expect the same from you.”

“Okay.” Will agrees, eager to hear more about his mom.

“We made our selves a life. It was a good one too.” Ed sighs and rubs a hand through his hair. “Kate became pregnant, we were excited and she… she was so happy. I was so happy,” Ed swallows hard “we set up the baby’s room together. We had a girl… Samantha. She was perfect, beautiful.”

Ed went silent again but Will knew he still had more to tell so he waited. “We had a happy year together. Then the week after her first birthday she got sick, very sick. By the time we realized how bad it was and got her to the hospital is was too late. She died the next day.”

“I had a sister” Will says in a small voice.

Ed nods “Then we had you and I thought Kate might recover. For a while it seemed like she would but she didn’t. Having another baby so soon after Samantha… It was difficult. Everything reminded her of the baby we lost. She couldn’t look at you in Sam’s cot without…” He stopped again, took a deep breath and then continued “She was there one day and gone the next and I was left with a toddler.”

Ed turns to look at Will “You were my saving grace Will. You brought me back to life. Gave me a reason again.” He turned back to look at the water again “It wasn’t you that made her leave. It was Samantha.”

“Did she love me?” Will asks.

“Get me another beer.” Ed says.

Will does and Ed cracks it open and takes another sip.

“In her own way. The first time she held you I thought everything would be fine. She wouldn’t let you go for that first night. Later she began to feel guilty for loving you, couldn’t move on from Sam.”

They watch the anhinga as it preens its feathers with a funny birdy sort of gusto.

“It would have happened with any child we had. She couldn’t let her self be happy. It wasn’t about you. I did things wrong for sure… I didn’t like the way she would ignore you, I picked fights when maybe I shouldn’t have. She blamed me for Sam, I blamed her for not being able to be a proper mom to you. We fought every day. After awhile she hated me. Couldn’t even look at me with out disgust, she’d get angry just from seeing me play with you. She couldn’t stand my happiness, so she ran away.”

The anhinga took flight, its powerful wings now dry lifting it into the sky.

“I’m sorry da, that Samantha died.”

“Me too son.”

“Is it strange that I miss her?” Will asks timidly.

“It’s normal to miss family.”

“Even though I never got to meet her?”

“I don’t remember my dad, miss him every day.” Ed comments.

“What was your mom like?” Will asks looking at his da’s face intently.

“Troubled… but she loved me in her own way.”

“I’m sorry you were so lonely da.”

“Had Jack.”

“And now you have me too.”

Ed smiles “I sure do… now tell me why you’re not in school, and no skimping on the details.”

“I need another Pepsi.” Will declares and goes to grab another from the small fridge that sits on the work bench.

Ed watches him with an amused eye. Will sits down again fidgets with the can but doesn’t open it yet. Instead, he focuses on the smells about the place, lets them full his mouth with tastes and his mind with images not his own.

“I’m afraid there,” Will says softly “I… I don’t like my teacher.”

Will felt suddenly sick and afraid. He knew he had to tell his da, but didn't know how to. He felt guilty as if he'd done… He knew he hadn't been the one to but… If he didn't stop it, he *would* be guilty.

Ed frowns in confusion "Mr. Fredrickson? But you've been happier at school than I've ever seen you? I thought you said he was the best teacher you'd ever had?"

Will nods "I thought he was. He seemed kind and was always so nice to everyone. He listens to all of us, even the annoying ones. He's patient and I thought I'd like him for another uncle." he gulped down some Pepsi and let out a burp.

Ed raised his eye brows and Will who smirked back for a moment before his lips drooped back "He was the first teacher that didn't want to get rid of me to another teacher. Said he didn't even need to talk to you."

"He did actually. A phone call to check in with me. Knew I didn't want to put you forward any years but wanted to make sure I was all right with giving you work for older kids."

"And at the start he never made a thing about me being different from other kids. I liked that, being treated the same as everyone else," Will takes another drink of his Pepsi and scans the sky for a distraction but doesn't find any. "At least at first, he did. After the first few weeks that changed but I liked it then, being special… He would let me off sometimes for things no one else could do. He would make secret jokes he knew only I'd understand, in the middle of class, everyone would be confused and I'd feel… superior," Will scrunches his face in disgust "I didn't even bother making friends with the other kids. Thought I was friends with Mr Fredrickson, and that he was better, smarter, older… a better friend than any of the kids in class."

A flock of birds can be seen in the distance, Will can faintly here them calling to each other, ideas and thought's on where they were in relation to one another. Boring mainly but a useful distraction.

"I'll have to talk to him about that. You're in school to be a kid and have friends that are kids… And I do distinctly remember you mentioning a friend in your class… John?" Ed asked trying to hide the accusation from his voice.

Will shook his head.

"You told me about him all the time… were you making him up this *whole* time?" Ed asks hurt in his voice.

"No. Kind of. John is my teachers name."

"You two eat lunch together?" Ed asks accusingly.

"We did." Will says his voice wavering a little.

"And you call him by his first name! that is… *not okay*… Will…I'm going in there…" Ed is clenching and unclenching his hands.

“I think. Maybe… you have to ring uncle Jack.”

Eds eye’s flash “Why?” he asks quietly.

Will gulps at his Pepsi and the flock is almost gone completely over the horizon. Too few distractions left and he could tell his da was starting to work things out. His da was no fool.

“I… he…. Nothing happened to me…”

Ed sits forward in his seat “what are you trying to say?”

“I looked him in the eye… I wish I hadn’t, but I did. I… it was good I did in a way since I was next… but I thought he was my friend. I thought I could trust him. But I was wrong. And a fool, an arrogant fucking fool and … I think he’s hurt a lot of kids. Likes it when they cry, it makes him feel powerful since there’s nothing they can do about it.” Wills face crumples up in despair and he begins to cry.

Ed leans forward and rests his forehead on Wills “It’s ok… *We’ll get the bastard*.”

Chapter Nine: Everybody Lies

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Mewtho9. Thank you so much for your comments and continued reading of my story. It is great encouragement.

Chapter Nine

Everybody Lies

November 8th 1995

Out-skirts of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Ed was quiet on the drive home; he was a little pale and sweaty. His hands were shaking where they clutched the steering wheel tightly. Will watched him warily, wondering if he shouldn't have just called uncle Jack behind his da's back. He'd never seen his da so angry in all his life and he'd seen him angry a fair few times.

At home Will washed and put on his pj's while his dad made dinner. They ate together silently, Ed's mind was toing and froing and Will had to work not to look, if only to ease his own nerves.

Ed was still strangely quiet when he tucked Will in bed and read him the next chapter of '*Watership Down'*, his voice lacked the normal amount of animation that he usually pushed into his words for Will's entertainment.

Ed paused after placing a kiss on Will's forehead and sits back down on the side of the bed instead of leaving as was usual.

"I'm so sorry Will," Ed says with sorrow tainting his voice "I feel I've let you down."

Will places his hand on his da's "No you haven't." he says in a firm voice.

Ed turns away from him and sits facing the wall, his hand though remains under Will's "I have. I should have been more interested in your schooling, should have meet your teacher. Should have…"

“You’re not psychic,” Will says before the man can continue on with his list of failures “I should have told you right the day I looked what I'd seen and not left it. But I felt *so* bad, for being *so* stupid. I should have told you from the start that John was my teacher and not a kid. But I *knew* you’d not like it so I kept it a secret. It’s *my* fault not yours.”

Ed looks back at his son looking more fragile than Will had ever seen him “No, this is not your fault. Not even a bit, you hear me. You would have been comfortable to tell me all this from the start if I hadn’t been so determined to force you into friendships with kids your own age. I … I was wrong.”

“No, you weren’t,” Will says “The best friend I ever had was Sarah and I ruined it by running away remember? If I’d been braver, I could have made another friend here. But I was afraid to, since we never know when we’ll have to leave again.”

“You ran away because I…”

Will sat up abruptly and grabbed his da’s arm “*Not everything I do is your fault*, I’m not *stupid*. I’m big enough now to take some responsibility for *my own mistakes*. You can’t take the blame for *everything* I do.”

“I… I don’t think your stupid” Ed says with emotions coming and going from his face Will has to look away.

“You treat me like I am when you act like I’m not responsible for anything I do, like I’m some sort of puppet incapable of even making my own mistakes”

“That’s not…” Ed begins.

“Da. This is *not* your fault.” Will says insistently.

“Nor yours.” Ed says firmly “but maybe you’re right. Neither of us are at fault. The only one at fault is that…” Ed shook his head “I have no words for him that I’m comfortable saying in front of you. So, I best not say a thing.”

Will smiles at his da “He’s a mother-fucking, arsehole, bastard.” he says.

Ed stares at him for a moment his mouth slightly open.

“What?” Will says “that’s not all I know; I *do* go to school.”

“I suppose you do,” Ed says pensively.

“I learn all sorts of cool things there” Will adds “Shit, wanker, whore, douchebag, cu…”

“I get it.” Ed says cutting Will off.

Will looks up at Ed with a smile on his face “Happy sailing da.”

Ed smiles back at him bemused. “Happy sailing son.” He replies.

Ed waited for several hours to be sure Will was asleep before creeping out and driving to a local gun store and shooting range.

He brought the first gun he'd had since his time as a cop, it felt strange to hold one again, he'd never liked them.

He had a practice at the shooting range but found himself rusty, which wasn't good considering he hadn't been the best shot to begin with. He had to get better so he promised himself that he'd come in everyday on his way to work to practice. He needed to be a least as good as he had been and preferably a hell of a lot better.

He wasn't going to be played in this this game any longer. He was going to do what he had to in order to take back control and be the father he'd promised himself he would be. The sort he'd always wished for. It was his job to protect Will and his track record at this wasn't the best.

It was true that as far as children went Will was a bit more difficult to protect, but that wasn't the kids fault. Trouble and arseholes were drawn to Will, and one way or another Ed would have to start sorting out what he could for himself.

The next morning Ed sent Will on an errand to the local shop to pick up some groceries. Then he rang the school and asked to speak to Will's teacher.

"Yes hello Mr. Fredrickson," Ed said when he got through to him "Its Ed Mitchel here, Will's dad."

"Ah yes Mr. Mitchel nice to hear from you again, how's everything going?" Mr. Fredrickson asks.

"You might have noticed Will's not been in school this last week. It never occurred to me that I might have to ring the school. But I was talking to my sister and she asked if I had. Well, you can imagine I'm a bit embarrassed…" Ed says trying to sound as natural as possible.

"Please don't worry Ed! Can I call you Ed?" Mr. Fredrickson asks.

"Of course, Ed's fine," Ed says "Thanks for being so understanding. Single dad, and not perfect."

"I hear you! And please call me John," Mr. Fredrickson says "so, how is young Will?"

“Been quite unwell, kid is always diving into the waterways, picked up something when he was doing that I think.”

“Sorry to hear that Ed. Hope he gets well again soon, such an extraordinary boy. You must be so proud.”

“I am. Very,” Ed said grimacing to himself. Trying to keep his temper in check was harder than he’d anticipated.

“I know how difficult it can be for single parents. My mom was a single parent, watched her struggle. You should know you’re doing a very good job; I take my hat off to you.” Mr. Fredrickson said.

“Yeah, it can be tough.” Ed comments.

“Listen Ed, I don’t normally do this. But seeing as your situation is so unique, I’d like to extend to you an offer of help if you ever need it, for anything.”

“That’s very kind of you John.” Ed says trying to sound thankful.

“Of course, I have a lot of experience with kids and I’m involved with my church’s meal run for people in need. I can organise some meals to be dropped off to you if you could use the help.”

Like butter wouldn’t melt in the fucker’s mouth. Ed hated people who name-dropped church as if that made them more trustworthy.

“That would be helpful, not the best cook!” He says instead.

“I’ll get on to them tomorrow! If it’d make you more comfortable, I’ll drop them off myself. It’d probably be a bit less awkward for you to have someone you already know.” John says.

“That’d be great thank you! Nice to have people who are willing to help no strings attached.” Ed says.

“Of course! You know what they say, it takes a village and all that.” John says.

Ed’s lip curls in disgust “Yes it does… Look I’d better go, Will’s calling for me.”

“Of course, see you soon Ed, nice talking to you.” John says.

“You too John.” Ed says and hangs up harder than he had to.

He starts pacing without even noticing he was doing it. “Would have hated him even if I didn’t know,” Ed mutters “too nice, irritating fucker.”

“Da? Are you okay?”

Ed swings around to see Will clutching a paper bag of groceries.

“Hi… all okay here. You had a nice walk?” Ed asks trying to rid any tension from his voice.

Will shrugs “it was ok.”

“Didn’t hear you come in.”

“You were busy pacing and swearing.” Will says and placed the bag on the bench.

“I was.” Ed agreed and came over to help put things away.

“Are you going to ring uncle Jack?” Will asks.

“Uncle Jack isn’t the only one capable of protecting this family.” Ed snapped, then winced “sorry Will, that was uncalled for.” He says and rubs his face with his hand “I’m not angry with you.”

“I know,” Will replies “It’s okay da, I know you’ll get him good and proper.”

Ed pushes a small smile on his face “thanks kid,” and place’s the fresh carton of milk into the fridge door “listen, your book money for this month has arrived but I’ve got a busy day of work today. I thought you’d be ok here and I’ll go to the shed get some work done. If I finish in time I’ll come back and pick you up and we can go to the book store then, how’s that sound?”

Will nods.

“Don’t spend all day watching TV though.” Ed adds and ruffle’s Will’s hair.

“I *know,*” Will says “I’ll finish my book as well, since I’m getting more… how much did they send this time?”

Ed snorts “you know your aunt, always over does it. Two-hundred, at this rate we’ll be buried in books in a few years.”

“That would be fun! We could make book forts!” Will says with enthusiasm.

Ed smiles at his son, Will’s ability to withstand the horrors of this world were astounding.

After practicing at the shooting range Ed goes into the local library and finds the phone books. Taking out his pad of paper and pen he makes a quick note and leaves.

From there he goes to his little boat shed and gets on with work. All the while his mind is buzzing.

His feelings were twisting up inside of him. A horrible ache. A terrible rage.

He had to be able to protect his family, no more standing by and allowing others to do things.

No more Davis allowing some brutes to kick his boy into the floor of a helicopter.

No more Davis refusing to let Will go without making him go through a series of tests which had nothing to do with Will running away.

No more letting arseholes steal his boy's innocence in terrible ways.

No more John.

This was it. His line in the sand. John Fredrickson may not have had the chance to… it didn't beer thinking about. But he had done the damage all the same. The moment Will had looked him in the eye he'd been forever traumatized. He understood now Will's strange behavior the last week. Understood why his nightmares were back and worse.

The things his son had seen, and felt. They should never be seen or felt by anyone, let alone a ten-year-old boy.

If John were a good teacher there should have been no danger for Will to look him in the eye. He would have seen a man's attempts to teach his student. But John was not a good man. The fact that he had been thinking about those things while looking at his son….

Will was seeing more and more when he looked now compared to when he'd been younger, but as far as Ed could tell what he still saw in a glance was just the person at that moment. Confined to that moment's thoughts and feelings. The fucker had been thinking about hurting Will, when Will, innocent trusting Will, had looked.

Ed threw the tool he was holding across the shed where it hit the wall harder than he thought it would. He couldn't work properly with these thoughts buzzing in his head. But he couldn't quiet them either.

He'd failed his job as a father. He always promised himself he'd never let happen to Will what had happened to him when he'd been in care. Had believed he'd know better than anyone the signs. How had be missed it!

He crossed the room and got a beer from the fridge and sat down on his old fold out chair. He couldn't work. Couldn't go home yet. Could barely look at Will for the shame he felt.

He'd do for Will what he'd always hoped someone would do for him. What he'd stayed up at night as a kid fantasizing about.

He'd almost forgotten that old rage. It was back now. It was an old companion from his distant past. It was his sleep gone to nightmares and terror. It was furry. It was hatred in all its fullness and twisting turning pain.

He got up not content to even sit still, and went into town to begin to organize his and Will's trip to Canada.

Will shuffles around the house for nearly an hour before he gets up the guts to ring his uncle.

“Uncle Jack?” Will asks eyeing the front door guiltily after the phone stops ringing.

“Hi Will. What’s up?”

“It’s da. I think he’s going to do something bad.”

“What do you mean Will?” Jack sounds a little worried, not at all as much as he should be.

“I think… I think he’s going to kill my teacher.”

“…”

“Uncle Jack?”

“What do you mean you think he’s going to kill your teacher?”

“I mean I think he’s going to kill him, like dead.”

“…”

“…”

“Is your dad there?”

“No, and you can’t tell him you know or I think he’ll go do it right away, just to make sure you can’t stop him. If you want to stop him, you’ll have to come out here secretly.”

“Okay. Has Ed said something that makes you think this?” Jack asks.

“No, its not like that. It’s a long story.” Will said “Can’t you just secretly come out here and I’ll meet you and tell you everything then.”

“*Or* you could just tell me the whole story *now* and then I’ll decide what to do about it. But you should know your dad’s not really the murdering type.”

“He’s not normally the type but he’s changed. He’s angry and a bit scary at times.” Will says with a bit of strain in his voice.

“I’m at a bit of a loss here Will, tell me the whole story so I’ve got some context to work with.”

“My teacher is a very bad man. He likes to hurt kids.”

“…”

“Uncle Jack?”

“Hurt kids how?”

“Badly.” Will replies quietly.

“Physically?”

“Yeah.”

“This his fists?”

“No. Not like that. *Worse*.”

“…”

Will hears his uncle sigh heavily on the other end. “Which kids?”

“I don’t know them.”

“Girls?”

“No.”

“Boys?”

“Yeah.”

“Only boys?”

“Yeah.”

“Your age?”

“A bit older I think.”

“Does he… does he touch them in ways he shouldn’t?”

“Yes, he… he likes it when they cry,” his voice turns shaky “he… he wanted to see me cry.”

“Has he… has he done that to you Will?” Jack is trying to keep his voice level so as not to upset Will any further.

“Not yet. But he wants to. Was planning to.”

“How do you know all this?”

“I saw.” Will says.

“You saw him doing this.”

“Yeah.”

“He did all this in front of you?”

“No… it’s hard to explain.”

“Well give it your best shot Will, this conversation is not over until I know exactly what’s going on out there.” Jacks voice was strained now.

“Shit, he’s back early. Got to go. Ring you tomorrow.”

“Wai….”

Will hangs up the phone. And sits down on the couch with the book he’d already placed there to look like he wasn’t doing anything wrong.

His da comes in “Want to go get those books son? I’ve got some business in town so you can go to that big bookstore you love so much.”

Will smiles at him, trying to hide how upset he’s been just moments before. “Oh *wow*! *Yay*! That sounds *great* dad!”

Ed frowns at him “you alright son?” he asks.

“Yeah? Why?” Will tries to sound confused.

“Nothing,” Ed is eyeing him seriously.

The next day Will doesn’t leave it so long to ring his uncle.

“Uncle Jack?”

“Will.”

“Sorry about yesterday, thanks for not freaking out or ringing back.”

“Actually, I did ring back, but you two must have been out.”

“Yeah, we went into town. Da took me to the book store, since auntie’s money arrived for my books. Then he told me to stay put so he could go get some business done. So, I followed

him, he went to the bank first. Then to a travel company."

"I suppose you see this as further proof that Ed's planning on murdering your teacher?" Jack sounded strained. Which Will thought was good, it meant he was taking it at least a bit seriously.

"Yep."

Jack let out a breath "you need to tell me how you know what you do about your teacher and you need to tell me now."

"It's hard to explain…"

"Try me."

"Da's going to be angry when he finds out I told."

"Better angry than in prison or dead."

"We, me and da I mean. We've been keeping secrets from you."

"Knowing Ed, he had his reasons," Jack replied not sounding at all surprised "Well, hit me with it then."

"You know how I don't like looking at people's eyes?"

"Yes Will, what about it?"

"It's because I find them over whelming."

"I already knew that," his uncle was starting to sound irritated, like he always did when people didn't tell him everything right away. "Are you going to tell me something new?"

"Because of what I *see* when I look at them."

"What *do* you see?"

"Them, there thoughts and feelings. Probably more if I looked harder."

"Everyone's?"

"Everyone's."

"…"

"Shit." His uncle is starting to sound very worried.

"I… I looked into my teachers' eyes, he was thinking about things, terrible things."

"You saw all this when you looked into his eyes?" Jack tried to clarify.

“Yeah.”

“I’ll catch a plane there tomorrow, the day after I’ll be by to talk, this a good time of day?”

“Yeah. Thanks Uncle Jack.” Will feels a lot better already. His uncle will sort it all out.

“It’s going to be ok Will; you did the right thing calling me.”

There was a knock at the door and Ed sent Will to his room telling him to stay in there and be quiet.

Will looked at his da like he was going to questions him, but seeing the look on his face thought better of it and went.

Still, it didn’t stop him from listening at the door. At least for a moment but then he heard that voice.

His body sunk down, like a puddle of lead on the floor, but he was still standing. There were two of him, the one still standing and the one bleeding out on the floor. He had backed up into the far corner before he’d even realized what he was doing.

He had never been more afraid of a person in his life. But now he knew two things for sure; monsters were real and there was one drinking coffee in his lounge.

“Come on in.” Ed said to John with a thankful smile on his ignorant face.

John responded in kind and walks in carrying the meals he had gotten from those idiots at the local church he liked to mess with.

Luckily for Ed, John couldn’t tell the difference between a real or fake smile, his skill at human emotion was dampened to the point that he could act the part, but not feel it.

For John the world was a long dull ache intermittent with the feelings of power and joy that he lived for. His happiness was all that mattered, he made his life as happy as he could, stole

his joy where he could find it. Splashes of colorful excitement on an otherwise painfully empty canvas.

Will was bringing splashes of color to his life, in order to keep that he needed the dad. Ed seemed stupid enough and easy to manipulate. He enjoyed the stupidity of such people; it was a constant reminder how much smarter he was than everybody else.

“I was wondering actually,” Ed was saying to him, “If we could meet at your house one day for a coffee? You know away from little ears?”

Hook, line and sinker John thought. He’d make Ed as reliant on him as he could. “Any time.” He says happily.

It was a job sitting in Ed’s little living room, drinking his terrible coffee, having this tedious conversation with him. But it would be worth it.

“Sunday night alright?” Ed asks him.

“Of course! Sounds like a plan, I’ll provide the food you bring the beer?” He asks trying to sound as much like an Ed kind of man as he could. The fool looks so pleased, does he even have any friends? Hopefully not.

It doesn’t take long and everything is agreed to and he manages to extract himself from Ed’s depressing, mediocre life.

His da and him have a little chat neither saying anything true. Just little meaningless reassurances between two liars. Out of all the things to happen after he’d told his da this was not it. He thought they’d call uncle Jack and he’d sort it all. Instead, Ed seemed determined to do it himself this time.

That and he kept insisting that they’d have to explain how they know what they do, and then they’d have to explain to Jack what Will could do.

“Why don’t we?” Will had asked, not understanding why it was such a secret.

“A gift like that would be tempting to a lot of people.”

“But it’s uncle Jack?” Will had said.

“The fewer people that know a secret the less likely it will get out.”

Will had then watched as his da packed himself some lunch and left for work. He waited for a half an hour and gave his uncle another call.

“he’s got a gun.” Will said to him.

“He showed it to you?”

“No, I waited until he was asleep, found his keys and looked through the car, he’s got it in the glove compartment.”

“Sounds about right,” Jack remarks “wouldn’t want it in the house.”

“I think he’s doing it soon.”

“I’m leaving within an hour for the airport, will meet you at your house that this time tomorrow.”

“You can’t let him do it, it’ll break him, I know it.” Will says

“I’ve got him covered; you don’t have to worry.”

“He’s going to be mad with me when he finds out I’ve told you what I can do.”

“No, he’s not, he’s going to be thankful he’s got a ten-year-old son with more sense that him.”

After work that day Ed picked up a couple of suitcases as well some other things, he thought it’d be wise to have when starting again in Canada.

He had some experience in starting again and was confident in his ability to pull it off.

He had been thinking about it for a while anyhow. Davis was still out there and could decide at any moment to steel Will away.

He trusted Jack… mostly, but knowing where they were would put him in an awkward position. This way they could stay in contact by phone call and Keep Will far away from those that would use him.

The thing that had finally tipped the scales on this decision was Will’s teacher.

They had no real evidence of what the man had done. They couldn’t tell anyone how they knew what they knew. He couldn’t even tell Jack because he wasn’t sure how much he was still in Davis’ pocket, and if the information got out… It couldn’t.

On top of that the chance of the charming church going man getting convicted was minimal. But even if he did Ed doubted he’d get life. Which meant sooner or later he’d be back out there. He knew John’s type; he wouldn’t be able to stop.

Could he live with himself if he let the monster go, knowing he'd destroy other lives. Ed himself would be the monster then. Knowing it would happen and letting it.

He knew what it was like as a boy to have your life so twisted up it splinted and broke apart into pieces. He'd not recognised himself after that day, he'd become something else, something angry and tense. Fearful of the world. He knew, and he wouldn't stand by and let it happen to anyone else when he could stop it. What he would have given for someone to have done this for him. He could be that hero for some other boy... For all the boy's John had hurt. Was it murder if it was right?

Jack and Bella would be worried but he'd call them when they arrived to let them know they were okay. They would find it difficult to accept. But he'd not give them the choice. When will was eighteen then he could decide for himself if he wanted to risk it. Until then he'd do his job to protect him. Even from Jack and Bella.

At home he found Will reading. He was going to be okay. It was all going to be okay. He was taking back their lives. He'd be able to raise Will free and happy without having to look over his shoulder for the invisible powers that lived hovering in the back ground.

That night when he was tucking Will into bed, he broached the topic of a vacation… starting tomorrow.

"Sounds like fun da." Will had replied.

Then they'd wished each other happy sailing and Ed had returned to the living room to be alone with his thoughts.

Will was being suspicious, far to compliant lately for it to be natural. If he had worked anything out… But he'd been careful and Will always respected his wish to not look without being invited… his murder schemes were making him paranoid he decided.

November 12th 1995

Sunday

"Get packed, everything you'll need or want for a few months," He looked at Will from across the breakfast table. "And no, you can't bring all your books, pick out your favorites and we'll put the rest into storage."

They worked all morning, packing and moving things into a storage locker Ed had already organized. Luckily other than Will's books they didn't have a lot they needed to keep. The landlord could sell off their furniture if he wanted, they had no more need of it.

After all the years that had passed… he'd finally seen the lawyer and bank about taking control of his inheritance. It'd been harder to organize than he'd thought but his family's old lawyer had turned out to have some loyalty in his old bones. Had sorted it all free of charge even though Ed now had more than enough to pay him. "For your grandfathers' sake." He'd said.

After they were done packing, they had a quick lunch and Ed went off to sort things out at the boat shed. He wanted to put his tools into storage as well.

Will kept peering down the street each time his da was occupied. He spied his uncle twice but the man was hanging back for now.

He was relived when his da finally left for the boat shed.

His uncle knocked not five minutes latter and Will let him in.

"you guys going somewhere?" he asked first after giving Will a quick hug.

"Surprise vacation." Will said.

"For how long?" Jack asks.

"Da says for months but I think he's lying." Will replies.

Jack sighs heavily "What the hell has been going on in that head of yours Ed?" Jack says while looking around at the now stark house.

They sit down on the couch in the living room "Well, there's no point wasting time on small talk Will, I'll get straight to the point. The first thing I need to know about is this gift of yours."

Will shrugs "I've always had it, was born with it, I think. But it's not much of a gift really. It makes things a lot harder sometimes."

"Some gifts just take more effort to harness before they can become something useful to you. Maybe this talent of yours is one of those?" Jack suggests watching Will's tense form next to him.

“Maybe,” Will shrugs “I just… I know I can help people with it but it hurts me. Sometimes I just can’t do it, it’s too much and I’m afraid all of the time, of what I might see. Especially now that I looked at John Fredrickson.”

Jack leans forward and puts his hand on Wills shoulder. Will curls into his uncle who pulls him close “It’s going to be okay Will. I’m here now and whatever is happening, I’ll help.”

“I know” Will replies then pulls back “I need you to stop da from killing my teacher and then I need you to stop John Fredrickson from ever hurting anybody else.”

“I’ll do my best,” Jack replies then looks away for a moment “But first I need to know what it is you see when you look. I need to make sure it’s accurate.”

Will looks at him with a frown “you don’t believe me?”

“Its not that, I just need to be sure. I’m not actually surprised, I’ve wondered about something like this for a while now, but all the same I have to be sure.”

Will nods “you want me to look at you?”

“that’d be the best way for me to check.”

Not one to waste time Will looks then, truly at Jack, right into his eyes and Jack is shocked at the realisation that Will didn’t normal look at him, not like this. He looked at his nose or checks or lips, anywhere but his eyes. It was a strange thing to see those blue eyes looking back at him so intently.

“What do you see?” Jack asks

“You love me… but your afraid of me,” Will looks a little shaken “afraid of what I can do. You know of abilities like this, you’ve herd of them before… the hidden man.”

Jacks’ eyes widen as Will follows along his thoughts that spiral thought connections from one memory to another “You don’t want to remember them; you don’t want me to see them. dead, dead, dead, too young, too small, there’s smoke, and men with guns and…”

Jack shuts his eyes, stricken. He is shaking and has covered his face with his hands. “that’s enough.” Jack whispers.

Will blinks away the images “your afraid I’ll end up like those children,” He states knowingly. “it’s one of the things your most afraid off. That I’m like them, that I can do the same things that they could. That I’ll die because of it, or … worse?”

Jack doesn’t respond for a bit. He sits for a minute, hands over his eyes. Body hunched forward with elbows on his knees. He looks so unlike his uncle that Will wonders if he accidently broke him.

But then Jack breaths in a big breath and sits back “when is Ed planning to take you on this trip?”

“Tonight, I think.”

“We don’t have much time then.”

“no.”

“I came just in time then, lets get this sorted.” Then Jack gets up and goes to his car to get his Nokia 1011.

Ed swears out loud when he arrives at the boat shed only to find he'd left the keys back home. He grumbles uselessly to himself all the way home, he doesn't have time for this. His plan doesn't afford for much more time, tonight is the night.

But when he comes around the corner to their street he is caught of guard by Jack who is heading up to the front door.

Ed stares unbelievably at the scene for a moment. It seems his son is a sneaky little shit.

"Shit." Ed says and turns his car around.

He's out of time.

John dies now.

Chapter Ten: Emptying the Empty

Chapter Notes

This chapter is for toolymcsnoothole for their review that made me smile.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Ten

Emptying the Empty

November 12 th 1995

Sunday

Out-skirts of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Ed arrived at the address just after one pm. Its off the beaten track a bit and isolated. It's an ugly modern build surrounded by trees and grass, the natural beauty of Louisiana.

Ed parks his car in front of the garage, so any car inside won't be easily able to leave and hides the gun in the belt of his jeans. He grabs the six pack of beer and steels himself. Tries to stop the shake in his hands. The adrenalin wafting intensely through his veins.

Getting out he locks the car up, minimizing any improvised escape if things go wrong. He's ready for this. He was a police officer once. But he's never killed a man before. 'Not a man, a monster.' he thinks to himself.

He walks as casually as possible to the front door and knocks. John answers and plasters on a fake smile "Ed!" he says, "Wasn't expecting you till tonight?".

"Sorry about that. Really needed to talk." Ed replies and John moves aside and lets him into the house.

Its furnished sparsely with modern furniture that looks more stylish than comfortable. It's all pristine and starkly white, lacking of any warmth. No photos or nick-nacks. Nothing to show any personality at all. A proper psychopath Ed thinks to himself. Devoid of anything under the surface.

Ed has known men like John before, many years ago now. He knows what it is that ails men like these, knows what's wrong like it was written across his eyes. John is empty. A hollow man walking around gobbling up the painful feelings of others to full his void. All the joy

and excitement in his life pulled from the hearts of children as he crushes the light from their eyes. The only way he'll stop is if he's dead. Of that Ed is certain.

He finds himself seated in the living room and John has appeared with glasses to pour their cans of beer into. Apparently, the man doesn't abide the taste of cans. Ed follows suit "never thought of doing this myself." Ed says, he is what John expects of him, he is in the dregs of men.

"I find that most things can be improved upon with a little effort." John replies.

He's added ice to their beer. Ed hates watering it down and he likes this brand of beer warm.

"And ice," Ed nods "thanks for this." he says, letting John see what he wants to, letting him educate his lesser self.

Ed had arrived early which was both annoying and excellent. He liked to know what was happening and when but Ed just turning up like this hinted that he had his trust. Foolish, idiotic man. John smiles in a friendly manner when the other man thanks him for a glass and some ice.

'Simple things, simple minds.' He thinks to him self with satisfaction.

Ed seemed justifiably impressed with his home. Only a few years old and large, not a home some one would think of a teacher having. But everything he had he had earned. His parents had been wealthy and had both died rather tragically in a car accident. Now that had been a trick, but it had been ruled as an accident. he'd been impatient in his youth, back when the years till there death seemed too long to be bearable.

He was comfortably a millionair with no need to work but teaching suited him well. So did volunteering at his local church. He helped with the free meal service and worked at the children's outreach with the city's poor. It was all *very* gratifying.

"So," he said looking over the scruffy man in old clothes with a slight internal cringe 'it really didn't take much to put a comb through one's hair' he thought snidely. "What brings you here?".

"Will," Ed supplied and placed his drink on the coffee table "he's complicated."

“Gifted children often are.” John says nodding.

“Will more so.” Ed adds.

“How so?” John asks.

“What I’m going to tell you can’t leave this house.” Ed said and watched as a spark came to light in the other man’s eyes. He had his attention.

“Of course.” John says “you can trust me with anything. I know we haven’t known each other long, but I feel like we are friends already.”

“I do also.” He says and push’s the most genuine smile he can manage over his face, the monster smiles back.

“Will isn’t actually mine.” He says to start.

“Adopted?” John asks.

Ed nods “In a way. My wife and I had a child, a girl. We were happy then meningitis came and took her from us.” Ed swallows.

“That must have been hard.” John tries to sound sad, it’s the hardest emotion for him to show. He wasn’t one for sadness, emptiness he knew like an old friend, actual sadness? Never.

“It was. Then my brother and his wife turn up one day with a baby. He works for the FBI and had found Will in a raid of some kind. I loved him right away, my wife… she struggled. Not helped by my brother’s refusal to answer any of our questions.”

“Did you ever find out?” John asked casually.

John was not behaving at all like how a normal person would to this news. He was interested, curious but not shocked. Maybe he didn’t realize he was meant to be, it was the sort of thing that gave a man like that away.

“I found out a bit as time went on. Jack set us up in Alaska, a middle of no-where sort of place. When we asked why we had to move out there he was tight lipped. Eventually my wife left, it was a bit too much for her after our daughter died.”

John nods encouraging “I can understand that.”

“Will wasn’t speaking as he should have been. I didn’t let it worry me. He’d do it when he was ready. Then when he was three, he started to talk, full sentences”

“I was actually meaning to talk to you about that tonight,” John butted in “Will’s not found of eye contact and struggles to make friends. Have you considered Asperger syndrome?”

Ed did a double take “never heard of it?”

“It’s a newish diagnosis, a type of autism.”

Ed shook his head “Will’s gifted.”

“They often are.”

Ed shook his head again to clear it “Any way, I’ll tell you my story then we can talk about any of your ideas.” Ed said knowing full well that by the end of his story the other man would be dead.

John was irritated. He had not expected his revelation about Asperger syndrome to be battered aside so easily. It was extra irritating because he was fairy certain he was right. He held his tongue just.

“We were out fishing that day.” Ed was saying.

He was going to have to hear about the man’s whole mundane life…

“Then a bear came out of the trees and Will, with out any fear ran at it.”

Or maybe not so mundane. His interest again sparked he tried to relax himself.

“Will spoke his first words then. Then he turned and talked to the bear and it listened.”

And there it was… Ed was delusional. *That* he could use.

“Now I don’t expect you to believe me right now, but I think by the end of my story you will.” Ed said.

John nods trying to look as thought he believes the mans kid talked to bears.

“Well after that my brother and his friends at the FBI moved us again. Baltimore. To avoid any more chats with large carnivores I think.” Ed said with a small laugh.

“Well Will was clearly gifted but had trouble getting along with other kids at first. Bit a kid so hard he needed stitches. We made friends with the family but I said too much and questions were asked. So, we were moved again. Will never took well to moving, poor wee fella.”

“He told me he’s moved a lot and that he struggles with it.” John added needlessly.

“We ended up in a small town, but we managed to carve ourselves out a good life. Will was happy. Had made a good friend. Then we got into an argument and he ran away.”

“They all try it at least once.” John says with a shake of the head.

Ed nods “Will doesn’t do anything by halves. Went into the national park and lived there for some days.”

John nods trying to look like he still believes him “how old was he then?” He asks

“Eight.”

“I see.”

“No, you don’t… But you will.” The man looks at him and for the first time John wonders if the man is smarter than he seems.

“My brother called in the higher ups and helicopters joined the search. They found him and took him back to the FBI where we were denied contact. They were running tests and things on him.”

John nearly laughed at the man then, the man was paranoid for sure, delusional defiantly, maybe schizophrenic? That would be perfect, he’d not be allowed to keep the kid behaving like this. But John could petition for custody.

“But you managed to get him out again?” John asks still trying to seem like he didn’t think the other man had just walked right into the palms of his hands. Will was his.

Ed nods “I’ve talked to Will since he was little about keeping certain things secret, things the government would want to use.”

John nods “truly a special boy you have.”

“You see you’re a little bit right, Will doesn’t like eye contact and maybe he does have that Asperger thing. But the reason why he doesn’t look people in the eye is because of what he *sees* when he does. He sees *everything*.”

The prick still wasn’t getting it, but he would.

“I’m told the world can be an overwhelming place for kids with Asperger syndrome.”

Ed feels satisfaction starting to build within him. The other man would know soon. Would know everything but wouldn’t tell a soul.

“He can see your thoughts and feelings.” Ed adds the other man is nodding like he understands. He will understand.

“He looked at you once, that was all it took. That’s the real reason Will has been away from school. He looked into your eyes and saw what you wanted to do to him.” He watches John closely and there it is. He is staring back at him, suddenly still.

“I’m not sure I understand.” John says.

“I’m sure you do. But that doesn’t matter, what does is this; I love Will more than anything else on this rock and you planned to hurt him.”

“Listen Ed, I really don’t know what you’re talking about. But it sounds insane.”

“I’m sure it does. But Will looked and he saw you. He knows what you are and now so do I.”

John stands up “I’m afraid you’re not making any sense and I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

“Sit back down John.” Ed says and slides the gun out and rests it on his leg pointed at John.

John swallows and eyes Ed seriously, Ed doesn’t look away when the other man eyes him in challenge. Then John sits back down. He manages to still look relaxed.

“Are you a murderer?” John asks him.

“I am many things. But the only thing for now that matters is that I am the father with the gun pointed at you.”

“I’m not who you think I am.” John says.

“Id wager your exactly who I think you are. My boy’s accuracy is uncanny. You’re a disgusting monster that hurts little boys to get your jolly’s,” Ed holds up his hand when John looks like he’s going to deny it “You like it when they cry don’t you.”

John leans back and stares at Ed seriously. All pretence gone, he is cold and emotionless and real for the first time Ed has ever seen.

“You’re claiming Wills psychic. That he reads minds. Claims that seem to be true… no-one’s ever worked it out before I’ll give you that. Your boy is even more exceptional than I imagined.” John nods “But you’re not a killer Ed. You’re barely holding your life together. You’re a wreak in a dead-end job. So let me tell you how this is going to play out.” John leans forward again a small smile on his face.

“I am going to call the police and they’ll look at me and look at you and I’ll tell you what they’ll see. You looking like some hobo, clearly unstable, ranting about what his boy saw in my eyes. Then they’ll look at me, neatly dressed, clearly wealthy, good job, church goer who helps with several charities. Who do you think they’re going to believe?”

Ed doesn’t reply, his gun will speak for him soon enough.

“Then once that is done with, they’ll see that your delusional, and psychotic. They’ll see that you have been harassing a good law-abiding citizen. They’ll take your boy off you, probably

lock you somewhere permanently, you'll be out of my way. But I'll be there for Will, I'll take him in. I'll be the hero of this story. Will is going to be my son. My very own personal psychic."

Ed actually laughs "you think you'd be able to control my son? You're a fool."

John smiles at him "He's just a child. I'm a man of means. If he makes things too difficult, I'll have him declared mentally ill as well. That way no one will ever believe him no matter what he says. He'll never see you again, for his own good of course. But I'll see him. Every single day of the rest of his short little tragic…"

BANG!

Maaaa

“I am a father who has known men like you in the past and I am going to do for Will and the others what I couldn’t do for my sel…”

“THAT IS ENOUGH!”

Ed turns in surprise to see Jack come into the room gun drawn and pointed at Ed.

“How long have you been there?” Ed asks him casually.

“I just arrived. Now put your gun down.”

“*He’s crazy!*” John is saying shakily “*He shot me!*”

Jack looks at John for a moment. “*Now* Edward.”

Ed eyes Jack “No.” he says.

“*For fucks sake Ed*, what the hell are you doing?!”

“This man is a mons…”

“*I KNOW*, I’ve spoken to Will. *Who do you think sent me here to stop you*?”

“This is FOR Will.” Ed replies angrily “*I have to protect him*.”

“*Don’t be a fool*. You’re not doing this for WILL. You’re doing it for YOURSELF! And what did you think would happen once *this man is dead*? CANADA? REALLY? You cannot actually believe Davis won’t find you there? OF COURSE HE WILL! He has the full resources of the United States government at his disposal! And then what? We’ll never see Will again! Is that what you want for him! *For our family*!”

Ed is shaking his head, a sinking feeling is in his gut, Jack is right.

John is picking himself up to stand, whimpering pathetically while he does. Ed can admit he is enjoying John in pain more than he thought he would.

“I… I thought we’d be fine.” Ed says to himself more than Jack.

“*Clearly you were not THINKING at all!*” Jack is shaking his head in disbelief.

“Well, I’ve shot him now…” Ed says weakly eyeing John.

“I CAN SEE THAT!”

“He’s a monster.”

“I KNOW!”

Ed is lowering his gun. “What are we going to do then?” he asks.

“WE are not going to do *anything*. You are giving me your gun and leaving.” Jack holds up his free hand impatiently when Ed looks like he’s going to comment. “*You* are going to take your car and go home and wait with your son. You are not going to talk to anyone, or go anywhere else. If you get on a plane, you will be putting Will in *danger*. If you try to run away with him anywhere else you are putting him in *danger*. You will stay put at home and wait for me there. AM I UNDERSTOOD?”

Ed nods, shrinking inside. He hands Jack the gun and leaves barely noticing himself walking. He sits in his car does up his seat belt and cries.

He drives somehow home.

He goes up the steps to the flat.

Will runs and gives him a hug but he feels nothing.

He is a monster now he thinks. He is the empty one.

He’d gone there to empty out a monster. But he’d managed to empty himself out as well.

When Jack pulled into Ed and Will’s road, he’s relieved to see Ed’s car outside.

He walks up to the door and goes in with out knocking. Will and Ed are seated on the couch talking.

“It’s sorted.” He says.

Ed looks at him with a frown “how?”

“I’m sure you’ll read about it in a newspaper soon enough,” Jack says scathingly “It’s helpful you packed, you obviously can’t stay here any longer.”

Man, Who Opened Fire on Police Dies of his Wounds
The latest updates

The man shoot dead by police was a school teacher who was accused of horrific crimes against children including violence and assault of a sexual nature.
Though his name is yet to be released we have it on good authority that the deceased was John Fredrickson, teacher at the local elementary school. Known for his work in charity, his crimes have come as a shock to those who knew him best.
‘I just don’t believe it,’ said Pastor Vic Adams ‘he was such a genuine, kind man. I never saw any hint of something like this.’ His disbelief is echoed around this community, and by the many people who he had helped through the years.
The police have yet to comment on what evidence they have found. But it seems unlikely to this reporter that an innocent man would have had a reason to open fire on police just doing their job.
‘I had no idea he even owned a gun! He was so against violence it just makes no sense!’ said his long-time girlfriend ‘we were planning to be married.’
On the other side of the divide are the parents of his students who are left wondering if there own children have been affected...

Chapter End Notes

If anyone sees any mistakes please tell so I can fix them.

Chapter Eleven: A Family Balancing

Chapter Notes

This one is for Mewtho9 again. Because he never ceases to comment and that encouragement is priceless.

Chapter Eleven

A Family Balancing

September 1996

Wolf Trap, Virginia

Fall had finally arrived with an early flurry of oranges and yellows that danced in spirals around their quint little house. With his inheritance in hand Ed had brought them a home of their own and a fair amount of partly wild land for Will to play on. With a hefty amount of money still in the bank they lived with few worries and Ed wondered why exactly he'd not done it sooner.

He knew why actually. He'd been stubborn.

Now the money allowed for him a small piece of control, this spot in the world was his and would be Will's after him if he had anything to say about it. Will technically didn't exist so he'd had to arrange to leave it to Jack and Bella with the understanding they'd make sure it all went to Will one way or another.

John was now an almost distant nightmare. He'd shot him and he'd died, and he wasn't sure how he felt about that… actually scratch that, he felt good about it, strong. A hero saving the world one dead arsehole at a time. But he hadn't been the man that had fired the killing shot, a fact that with the wisdom of hindsight he was thankful for.

Jack had called Davis and Davis had agreed to cover it all up. With the condition that Jack had to put a bullet in the man's head. Jack had done it. For Ed and Will and their little family.

Ed had never been able to pull the trigger when he'd been in the field. But Jack had. He'd had to on many occasions and it had become a sort of non-event. So, with ease, Jack had done it again. And when not long after they'd found all that evidence, he'd said he was glad he'd done it. As far as Jack was concerned, justice had been done. No crime. No foul.

Jack had shot John point-blank execution style which is more than John had deserved. Ed had been planning to make it last longer and that was the problem he supposed. He could see it now, clear as day. The darkness in himself waiting for the right excuse to blossom into bloody horror.

When Ed looked at himself in the mirror, he could see his own potential for darkness. He knew that there were people the world would be better off without and how easy it would be to just sort out the problem.

Jack somehow kept himself in check. Ed did not think he'd be able to do the same, if he got a taste for it, he probably wouldn't stop.

He would not become the problem he wanted to stamp out in the world. He had a more important job.

Raising Will. Good, Kind, empathetic Will.

Flawed Will who had just ran mud *all the way thought the house again*! "OI! *WILL!*"

Will loved the new house, or more accurately the surrounding land of long grass that turned into trees. The land was full with life. The birds swooped by him when he ran, cheering him on with words alike to "Fly, soar, float". There were squirrels and hare's and rats and mice, chipmunks and muskrats and if he stood still on certain spots, he could hear the strange little voices of moles under the ground "worm, dirt, worm, sniff, shuffle, dirt."

He was among friends always and found he preferred their simple voices to those of men or the seemingly mythological creatures that stalked him. Men tell lies, animals didn't.

The seemingly magical creatures were much to Will's frustration even more complicated that humans. Tending towards half truths and riddles, or just plain unhelpful silence as they followed him about and stared.

"The wind is new." One muttered.

"Aodh!" another voice piped up from within the bark of a tree "Aodh is adrift."

"Brandubh knows, the truth is in the wind. A prince."

"Born of three of three."

"Brandubh bows."

He was not even certain they were real, their voices differed so much from the animals that it was hard for him to find a connection between this world and them. So, whether he was mad

or he was the only one in the world who knew about them he figured didn't matter, they were real enough.

From what he'd managed to glean from the year he'd been in Wolf Trap they were reporting back to Brandubh the raven-stag. He had thought he'd seen glimpses of them back at New Orleans, but now spending so much of his time away from people they seemed more comfortable to be seen and heard in the open.

They all obeyed him if he ordered them too, but his wording had to be precise and downright detailed to get anywhere useful… and he felt he was stealing something precious from them when he did. Their free will.

A squirrel with a purple tinge to its fur and flowers growing just behind its ears had taken to climbing in through his bedroom window and curling up next to him under the blankets at night.

It would sometimes crawl right into his dreams, following at his heels while he explored a palace among the stars and waterfalls that swept across universes bringing with them color's he'd never seen or imagined existed.

It went where he went, sat upon his shoulder when he danced with the king of the star palace in a land called Sathurl where it was always night but never dull.

The beings that lived there were just as likely to be the monsters of nightmares as they were to invite him for a dance and feast. Sometimes when he visited, he spent the night running across Sathurl with the squirrel clutched safely in his arms as they were chased by creatures with horns and fangs and rage.

Other times the king would call for him and he'd dance through the night and eat food that was sweeter than he'd ever tasted on earth. The locals seemed to find him an interesting creature unlike any they'd seen before. It was true he was a foreigner there. But to him they were the strange creatures. He was as he should be, except that he felt he'd somehow found a way to traverse universes in his dreams.

In the night Sathurl was real, in the day it was a strange haze, a fantasy built by his sleeping brain heightened by sleeping next to the strange magical squirrel.

When he told his da about it, his da had said it was a sign of his brilliant imagination. He didn't mention the squirrel. He felt sure it would leave and he'd never see it again if he did.

It had been decided all around that school was not a place where Will could be forced back to. He was too big now to be carried kicking and screaming into the building and he was

proving even more stubborn than Ed. Something Ed was proud of most of the time and infuriated with the rest.

Jack had decided to hire a tutor that specialized in gifted kids and who Ed suspected was being paid a pretty penny for it.

Mr. Dion Lester had been carefully vetted by the FBI to prevent any more situations. As well as that, on Davis' advice had been made to sign a non-disclosure agreement much to said tutors' bewilderment.

Ed's wish for Will to have more friends his own age had come to a stuttering halt after Will refused to join a single club with other children involved. He claimed he had enough social skills to be getting on and preferred the company of animals over people any way. Ed did not find this a comfort. But Will was well past the point in his life when he would be forced to do anything.

It was something Ed had made himself to accept with no small amount of pride.

Will ran every morning before breakfast, gone as the sun rose, dashing off at a pace that Ed would not be able to keep. Gone from view in moments, flocks of birds soaring with him towards the trees.

Ed knew Will had animal friends even if he didn't trust Ed with that knowledge. No grizzly bears though which was decidedly a good thing as far as he was concerned. But an abundance of wildlife Ed had not known was even there followed in Wills footsteps whenever he went out to play. Ed looked on in wonder and kept it a secret from Jack. The less people knew the less likely Davis would find out. Davis was Wills biggest enemy now, just as he had been his own in his youth.

All things considered Ed approved or Mr. Lester. He was a man that didn't give his opinions thoughtlessly. He was slow to make suggestions and quick to listen. Which as Ed didn't like to be told how to parent his son suited him just fine.

The man knew how to pace Will in his subjects. Challenging but not pushing. In some areas Will was advanced and in others very advanced. But Mr. Lester had agreed that Will was a child first and therefor his education while important was one of only a dozen things that were all important.

Lester kept his mind engaged after breakfast and would even stay for lunch for a game of chess before leaving. Will had not liked it at first, finding the rules too restrictive. But then as he played more, he began to see the creativity of the game untwist itself before him.

Then with the tutor gone and if the weather permitted Ed and Will would go fishing. If the weather was too bad for the outdoors, then they'd play cards or make their own lures out of collected materials. Or if they didn't want to do any of that they worked together fixing up the old ford they'd found in pieces in the large shed out back when they'd moved in.

Despite having no friends his own age, Ed could admit that Will was happy. As much as possible, and for as long as possible Ed's life was now about making sure Will had a carefree

childhood. A happy childhood. He hadn't always managed it but he'd tried his damn best.

Happy memories for Will's probably challenging adult-hood could be a sort of lifeline. Will remembered everything with such clarity that Ed hoped that even after he was gone Will would have enough good memories to be getting on with.

At night when Will was asleep Ed had begun writing letters. Letters for Jack and Bella and most importantly for Will.

Sorrow followed Will like an unstoppable force. He'd held it back as long as possible but now he could see the cracks appearing in the sort of life he wanted for his son. Some things in life were inevitable.

When Winter had fully taken hold on their piece of the world A new family member arrived.

Ed was cooking breakfast at the time, Will had been out as usual running through their little wilderness. But today was different, Will didn't arrive home alone.

Ed went out onto the porch as Will arrived, a ruffled looking dog just behind. Will's smile was bright when he saw his dad.

"Hey da!" He said "Meet Winston."

Then Will turned to the dog "Winston this is my da."

Winston thumped his tale on the deck excitedly.

"Where did he come from?" Ed asked as they walked into the house.

"He doesn't have a home so he's coming to live with us." Will explained.

"We a family of three now?" Ed asked.

Will bounced up and hugged him "Yip."

"If he has a family already, they might come looking for him." Ed mentioned.

"He doesn't" Will replies unperturbed.

So that had been that, no one came looking and they were a family of three.

Ed was grateful for Winston for choosing that time for trotting enthusiastically into their lives. Three was better than two. Ed was happy for that.

Unfortunately, everything wasn't happy sailing for them. Not that Will was aware but now a days Ed had a lot of appointments that couldn't be missed. So, Bella had been having Will at her house where he had his own room. His aunt always had activities planed for them and Will loved going there.

One night when Will was staying at his aunts and uncles, his aunt took him to see 'Michel Collins' at the movies. After they'd been happily talking about it at the table when Jack arrived home looking strained.

Bella made pasta for dinner. Will loved his aunt's pasta, she always sprinkled an extra generous amount of cheese on Wills.

But Jack was barely speaking and not joining in on the conversation as he normally did. Will observed him from across the table.

"It's because of that serial killer, isn't it? That's your so worried." Wil said.

Jack raised his eye brows "How do you know about that?"

"I have my ways." Will shrugs.

"You have your ways? Your dad doesn't own a tv or a computer and he doesn't get a newspaper… Your morning runs?"

Will tries to hide his smile by having a sip of his juice.

"You're what exactly Will? Stealing news papers?" Jack asks tersely.

"No! I don't actually steal them! Old lady Jane Borrows lets me have them after she's finished with them."

Jack and Bella have both stopped eating and are staring at Will.

"And who exactly is old lady Jane Borrows?" Jack asks.

"Our next-door neighbor, we have a thing. I bring her mail to her and she lets me have the news paper from the day before."

"Will… Does your dad know this?" Bella asks.

"No…" Will says rubbing his hands over the table.

Bella reached across and took one of his hands into hers. “If you feel the need to keep something a secret it’s normally because you know you shouldn’t be doing it.” She says gently.

“Da wants to protect me… but I’m okay. And I can help a lot of people, just like uncle Jack,” he smiles up at his uncle who doesn’t smile back “Besides if no one else can protect those people shouldn’t I? Because I *can* I mean?”

“Oh honey, that’s not your responsibility. Your only responsibilities are to do your school work and growing up happy and healthy,” Bella squeezes his hand briefly “Besides your uncle is doing a good job protecting people already.”

“But not as good as he could be doing, if he had my help” Will says seriously.

Bella looks at Jack and Jack looks at Bella and then they both look at Will.

“I’ve already worked out a whole lot about her.” Will adds imploringly to his uncle.

“Her?” Jack asks with increasing interest “you think it’s a woman?”

“Yeah, it’s a lady.” Will replies.

“What makes you….” Jack starts.

“No!” Bella interjects before Jack can finish “Jack, can I talk to you?”

“We *are* talking.”

“You *know* what I mean!” She says and stands up and leaves the room.

Jack sighs “Hold that thought.” He says to Will and then follows Bella from the room and upstairs to their bedroom.

Will can hear them whisper yelling all the way down stairs. There version of not yelling rests just as heavily in his stomach as if they had yelled. He hates it when they fight. Hates it more when its his fault.

He gets up and follows the sound up the stairs and to their bedroom.

“Peoples lives!” Jack hisses as Will enters as of yet un-noticed.

“You will NOT do this!” his aunt is all fury; he’s never seen her like this before and he doesn’t like it.

“Just forget about it,” Will says pleadingly, wishing he’d never said a thing about it to begin with “I’m sorry *please stop*.”

They both stop and turn to look at him. Deflating at the sight of his hunched-up shoulders and bowed head.

“No more visits to Mrs. Borrows Will.” Says Bella ending the silence “I won’t tell your dad but you have to promise me.”

Will nods “*promise*.” He replies.

Bella lets out a breath, glares at Jack and comes over to Will whom she gently leads back down stairs to Finnish dinner.

Jack doesn’t join them.

“Hey kid.” Ed says when Jack and Bella bring him home.

Will smiles at him and hugs him with a wrinkled nose “you smell weird.” He says.

Ed and Jack share a look over the top of him “Thanks son.” Ed replies.

They all head in and Ed wraps himself in a blanket before sitting in his chair by the fire which is bright and hot and inviting.

Bella makes hot coco for everyone and they all sit together while Will curls up on the floor with Winston and in an hour is fast asleep.

“So…” Jack whispers to Ed “Has be been talking to Winston?”

Ed shakes his head “Only in the ways you’d expect a boy to talk to his dog.”

The adults talk for a bit and then with surprising gentleness for the man Jack carries Will upstairs, puts him in bed and covers him gently with blankets. He is aware that Will has woken up but decides to let him feign sleep. He pats the bed and Winston jumps up next to him.

Jack stands for a moment looking at Will’s peaceful face and smiles fondly. He shuts the door and heads back down stairs to join Ed and Bella by the fire again.

Ed and will go fishing Christmas morning. A hot breakfast packed to eat while they fish and talk. They don’t catch a thing, too engaged in conversation and good food.

Then they head back home for a quick clean up and presents before heading of to Jack and Bella's in time for Christmas lunch, and then some games followed by Christmas dinner. Afterwards, since Ed and Will are staying the night the four of them stay up past midnight playing cards and chatting.

Unable to sleep and without his fairy-squirl to talk to Will sits on the edge of his bed looking out at the stars in the sky and wondering if they are the same stars in the skies of his dreams.

Eventually he does fall to sleep, but when he wakes it is with a heavy fog in his head. He walks down stairs to where he can hear the adults talking.

They don't sound happy "we've got to consider it at least." His uncle is saying.

"No." Ed replies.

Will who is concentrating hard on his eves-dropping accidently stands on the wrong stair and the floor squeaks.

"I hear him now." Bella says and the adults fall silent.

Will comes into the living room where they are all sitting "Are you arguing?" he asks them.

"No more than you weren't sneaking." Ed comments with eye brows raised.

"We've just been discussing some things." Jack says.

Ed nods at Will "everything is fine."

Will doesn't look, instead he sits next to his da happy to believe him.

"Your Uncle has to go into work, so we're going to keep your aunt company for the day. How's that sound?" Ed asks his son.

Will smiles "Yeah!" he says enthusiastically to his aunt.

Bella smiles back "You always manage to brighten my day Will."

Will looks thoughtful "how do I do that?"

"Just by being you." Bella says.

"You brighten mine too," Will says "So do you da, and uncle Jack."

Ed puts his arm around Wills shoulders brings him closer into his side.

Jack nods "I do tend to have that effect on people."

Bella laughs "we can always count on you to be our very own ray of sunshine." She says smiling at her husband.

Jack smiles back “Truly though, if I am a ray then you are the sun.” Then he leans in and kisses her.

Bella returns the kiss; it is slow and relaxed.

Ed shifts in his seat and clears his throat a few moments in.

“Oh, be quiet old man.” Jack jokes.

Ed glances meaningfully at Will.

Bella laughs again “A kiss isn’t going to scar him! He’s tougher than you give him credit for, besides he sees it all the time when he stays.”

Ed eyes Will “Oh.”

“Why would kisses scar me?” Will asks curiously “I like it when they kiss da.”

“And there you go Ed,” Jack says “Your kids not such a prude.”

“I’m not a prude… I just don’t think it’s appropriate.”

“Why?” Will asks “doesn’t it make you happy to see them happy?”

“Of course not, he’s jealous and wishes he could kiss my Bella, like every other man she’s ever meet.”

Ed looks every where but at Will or Bella “of course not… And I am happy, very happy for you both of course…”

“Your da loves knowing we’re happy Will, Ignore your uncle Jack. He loves to tease Ed a little too much.” Bella says and playfully shoves Jack on the shoulder.

“To be fair, Ed likes to wind me up as well.” Jack adds.

“Only I’m better at it.” Ed says dryly.

1997

One weekend when Bella was away in Europe for work and Ed had important appointments that had to be gone too, Will went to stay as usual at his uncle and aunts. Not as usual he had to go into work with Jack. Jack had received Strick instructions to not let Will see anything a boy his age shouldn't. Vague on purpose to cover all manner of things.

Will had packed a selection of books for both reading and puzzles and he'd sat in the staff lunch room happily for most of the morning occupied. But by the time he'd had his packed lunch he'd lost interested in either his books or the television and had begun wondering the room listlessly.

It would have been more interesting with company but Winston had to stay home when he went to his uncle and aunts. His secret animal friends never showed up in a place so polluted by humans, or so they said. So, he was board and a little bit lonely for his home with all those voices always buzzing about.

He knew he should stay put; he knew his uncle would be mad, but he couldn't bring himself to care. So instead, he opened the door and peaked around at the nearly deserted hall. He could just go and find his uncle he figured. Ask if he could go for a walk out side in the fresh air. Grass and dirt nearer to his feet, sky and sun and life… His uncle *KNEW* he hated being cooped up inside without even a window to stare out longingly. Technically this was his uncle's fault.

He takes of at a wonder back the way he knew went to his uncle's office. It was strange being back here. He didn't recognize anywhere from his stay those years ago which was a good thing. Still, he knew the smell of the place. Knew the terrible lightning that buzzed its way inside his brain. It made it self a dull ache in his chest that he had to push down to avoid.

He came across the odd person rushing about their day. Some looked at him curiously as they passed but no one stopped him. He stopped down the hall from his uncle's office and looked at his door. He could hear his uncle's raised voice vibrating down the hall, someone had pissed off his uncle. Wrinkling his nose, he decided it was bad timing and his best bet was to wait it out.

Instead, he ducked through some double doors into an extra strongly lit, extra chemically smelling room. 'Sterile,' he thought to himself 'poisonous to life.'

It was a stainless steel and concreate tomb. Even with all the chemicals Will could smell decay. Death. He knew that smell somehow. He edges further into the room to where a white sheet hides a body on a table. He knew it was a dead body like how he knew it was a woman. Like he knew she'd been murdered in a flurry of furious stabbing.

He pulled the sheet off and watched it slink onto the floor. 'Another one,' he thought 'like the others.'

He blinked; the world quivers. He looked at the blade in his hand, a kitchen knife. The women didn't know him but he knew her. He had watched her and found her *unworthy*. He felt his lip curl in disgust. Felt the intense shivering of rage take over his body. He felt the knife when it pushed through the skin and struck bone with a jolting thud over and over…

A hand is shaking him angrily "*Are you deaf*?"

Will blinked up at a man in a white lab coat frowning at him, Will shook his head feeling dazed.

"What are you *doing in here*?" The man is raising his voice and has Wills arm in a tight hold. But he can not seem to move away. He is still trying to find himself again. The cavernous room is cold and bright and hadn't he just been holding a knife? he looks at his hands. No knife. He's relived. He hasn't done anything.

"I didn't do it." He says out loud.

Other people where inside the room now also. There was some talking from far away. His uncle's name is mentioned and people are leaving.

He is aware of his uncle as soon as he enters, he takes up so much room. Normally he doesn't notice but right now he finds he can not help but notice. His uncle is a giant amongst men. A warrior sent to save the ignorant masses.

"Will?" He hears his uncles voice from beside him, gentle. His presence fills the room but he is gentle with Will. "What are you doing in here? You were meant to stay put…"

"I came to ask if I could go outside." Will replies quietly.

"In here?" Jack asks

Will shrugs "It's her isn't it." He says instead "She takes what they don't deserve." He shakes a little and Jack reaches out to steady him.

The murmur of the others is stopped by Jack raising his hand for silence.

"Will… you've said before you think the killer is a woman, why is that?"

"She's angry at them, they're all moms?" Will asks the last bit a little unsure as he notices the room has a half dozen people staring at him incredulously.

"All but one, but that's the demographic, twenty to forty-year-old females." One of the younger men answers.

"Are there photos of the victims, from before they were dead, I mean?" Will asks.

"Let's take this to my office," Jack turns to the man that spoke "Price."

"Right away sir." Price leaves in a rush and Jack guides Will to his office.

Price comes in soon after followed by two others and hands Jack some files. Jack seats Will at his desk and after flicking through and finding what he was looking at hands a pile of photos to Will.

The first thing that Will notices is how many there are. Too many.

“Who have you been looking for?” Will asks accusingly.

“White male, mid-twenties to fifties, Problems with woman. Unsuccessful and possibly has a overbearing mother…”

“So, you have nothing.” Will says “isn’t that profile ready-made?”

“Tried and true.” One of the men says but Will ignores him.

Will pauses on one of the photos “This one,” he says “she feels bad about killing her.” He hands the photo to Jack.

“The one who isn’t a mom.” Price says with a hint if surprise in his voice.

Jack nods at Will “What can you tell us,” Jack hands Will back the photo “about her?”

Will holds the photo gently in his hands like he’s holding a prayer book spread over his palms. “She’s like her. She didn’t know it at the time because she saw her with them every day. Her nephew and niece. She thought they were hers but they weren’t. She’s sad for killing her. It was a mistake so I… She’ll be more careful from now on.”

“So, this woman kills other women because they can have babies and she can’t?” Jack asks with disgust.

Will is suddenly on his feet and glaring at Jack “No!” he says angrily “They died because they *had* too. They didn’t deserve them; don’t deserve the lives they took for granted. But I DID! It was stolen from me and given to them, the UNWORTHY!”

Will takes a step forward and something is off about it. Jack takes a step back and looks at Will carefully. Will is standing with a different gait than usual. His face is twisted into something unfamiliar. It is him but not. It is something else.

“Will?” Jack asks tentatively.

The Not-Will takes another step forward “They live their perfect little lives without care about who they stole it from!” Not-Wills eyes flicker briefly to Jacks desk and then back again a small smile of satisfaction on his face “Well I wont stand by any longer *I am the worthy*! Mocked daily by the unworthy and I will have my *vengeance*!” Not-Will moves quickly and snags up Jacks letter opener and has it in his hand pointing up his stance changed before any one knows what to do.

Jack holds up his hand for calm before the others in the room can react foolishly or otherwise.

“Who is she? Who are you?” Jack asks firmly.

Not-Will smiles, a snarly twitchy smile. Then he winks at Jack “It’s not a big secret big boy.” Suddenly Not-Will lunges gripping the sharp part of the letter opener against Jacks hard belly.

“I’m the mourning widow, the childless mother, I am the burnt, my life has been stolen and now I am nameless wraith here to haunt the underserving.”

Jack keeps his arms as relaxed by his side as he can as he slowly kneels. Will withdraws the blade an inch to let him.

“Will?” he asks gently trying to get his nephew to look back into his eyes “Come back to me…”

Not-Will raises the blade to Jacks throat but Jack is ready and has training behind him. Before Not-Will realizes what is happening Jack has his hand in his grip twisted away and squeezed hard enough that Not-Will has dropped the letter opener. A look of shock of shock flickers on his face turning to fury. He uses his other hand and lunches an attack on Jack with fist and foot.

Jack barrels forward big arms wrapped all the way around Will caging him in and holding him tightly “Will! Its your uncle Jack! Come back…”

There is a splash of shocking cold water thrown over them by one of the others and Will sags, becoming limp in his uncles’ arms.

“Will?” Jack asks him.

“Uncle Jack?” Wills voice is tired.

Jack sighs and picks them both up off the floor he eyes Price who holds an empty pitcher “Good thinking” he says.

Jack puts Will back into his desk chair then takes one of the towels offered and wraps it around the boy who is shrinking in himself.

“She’s Ugly, scared by a fire, I think. A car crash or something, it killed her whole family. Another mom was drunk driving and hit them. She doesn’t think the mom that hit their car got enough of a sentence, she was rich and got a good lawyer. The killer thinks she got away with murder.” Will is fiddling with his fingers, staring at them and avoiding everyone in the room.

Jack squeezes his shoulder “Thank you.” He says to Will “As for the rest of you, you herd him!”

Jack doesn’t need to say anything more to them, they are his team. They know what to do.

Jack sits in one of the chairs usually meant for guests and looks at Will and sighs heavily.

“You might have just saved a lot of lives.”

“I know.” Will replies.

“We can never tell your Da or aunt Bella about this.” Jack says.

“I know.” Will replies. He hates it when his family are angry with each other and he knows his da and aunt would be *very* angry if they every found out about this.

“Our secret?” Jack asks.

Will nods “Our secret.”

When Will goes home the next day his da asks him how going to work with Jack was.

“Boring.” Will says.

Ed smiles at him “Good, better to be boring in a place like that.”

Chapter Twelve: Light a Fire

Chapter Twelve

Light a Fire

January 1997

Wolf Trap, Virginia

Jack pulls up into the drive and slows down near the house before putting his car in park. Will comes bounding out of the house, his curls in need of a haircut are bouncing about as he runs with Winston at his heals “Uncle Jack!” he yells happily and Jack could feel his own face ease into a smile at the sight.

Ed follows at a much slower pace; his friend looks tired. He’s losing weight and starting to look older, and more fragile. It filled Jack with anger that he could not bear the taste of. He pushed it aside, a wall between him and it.

Jack winds down his window, watching as Will and Winston dance about the long grass which has turned mushy from the freshly melted snow. “Ed.” He says as his brother reaches him “How are you doing?”

“Fine. We’re both doing fine,” he looks at Will who has found a stick and is throwing it for Winston to chase down “Thanks for this.” He adds and leans against the car.

“No need to thank me, we’re family.” Jack says.

“Still,” Ed replies “Thanks.” Then he waves Will over “come on and give your da a hug before you go.” He says voice raised to be herd over the distance that Will had managed to cover so quickly.

Will is there in moments and Jack notes that he is only getting faster and more agile as he grows. He gives his da a hug, and Ed kisses his forehead “Happy sailing.” Ed says.

“Happy sailing.” Will replies and goes around to sit up front with his uncle while Ed puts his backpack in the back seat.

“By da! Love you!” Will waves and smiles brightly back as they begin to drive away. Ed waves back a smile also on his face and Jack can feel his insides twist. He watches Ed in his rear-view mirror and steals himself again against the encroaching wave of feelings.

“You caught her.” Will says beside him catching his attention.

“How’d you….”

“Stole a newspaper for real since I have to stay away from Old lady Jane Borrows now.” Will says without shame.

“*Will!”* Jack starts.

“Well *how else* was I meant to find out! I can’t ring and ask you since it’s a secret from da and aunty Bella *and you know da got rid of our TV!* Da even told Mr. Lester he isn’t allowed to let me use the internet unsupervised!”

“He’s trying to protect you.”

“I know that but he might as well build a wall and be done with it.” Will says with an edge of anger.

Jack snorts “Are you becoming a teenager Will?”

“I’ll be twelve this year! I’m not a little kid anymore,” Will says defensibly “*So what* if I am becoming a teenager, no point stalling the inevitable.”

“Do you not like it there with Ed?” Jack asks after a moment.

“I love it, you know I do. He went all out making sure I’d be happy there, and safe, very *very* safe.”

“That’s all he wants for you. You’re happiness, You’re safety.”

“I don’t mean to be ungrateful. I do know what he’s done for me and he’s the best dad any one could have. But I can see he doesn’t trust me; he still acts like I’m a kid even though I’m at least as smart as him and just as wise now as well.”

“Do you think so do you?” Jack asks face blank.

“Yep, if it wasn’t for me, he’d have killed John and we both know what that would’ve done to him. As it is he’s depressed.”

“What makes you say that?”

“He’s losing weight and barely eats, he’s quieter than usual, tired all the time and he spends hours holed up in his room alone with the door locked.” Will lists of to his uncle.

“Have you been looking Will?” Jack asks with an edge in his voice.

Will frowns “no! I know how he likes his privacy. Besides I don’t need to. I still get my monthly book store trip and I’ve been reading up on depression. It fits.”

Jack sighs “Ed wouldn’t want you worrying about him.”

“Because he doesn’t trust…”

“That’s not why.”

“You didn’t even let me finish! He doesn’t trust me to handle it. He thinks it will upset me! But I *can* handle it!”

“Have you tried talking to Ed about all this?” Jack asks then.

“No…” Will says a little bit of a wine in his voice.

“Because?” Jack prompts.

“I … I don’t know.” Will says.

“If I were Ed, I’d want to see you behaving in a way that proved to me you could handle what you think you can. But you’re not…”

“AM SO!”

“*You’re not Will!* You’re in a rush to be an adult now but you’re not one quite yet. An adult is mature enough to sit down and talk to his dad about something like this. You’re behaving like a child whether you see it or not, and that’s not a bad thing because you *are* a child and trust me when I say being an adult isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.”

Will folds his arms and stares out the window sulkily.

Jack manages to keep his face strait “Seeing as you already know, yes we caught her. Well done Will you saved a lot of lives.”

Will relaxes next to him and Jack knows he is pleased. “And,” Jack adds “you kept it a secret from your dad, I’m impressed.”

“I’m more impressed you kept it a secret from aunt Bella” Will says.

Jack chuckles “Desperate times.”

“She’d have gone NATO at you if she’d found out,” Will says sounding almost amused by the idea. “Beat your arse good and proper.”

Jack raises his eye brows “Language Will! But yes, it *is* best for us that she never finds out about this.”

“Of course,” Will says “And it’s a bit fun having a secret.”

“This is not a game Will.” Jack says seriously.

“Depends on your definition of *game*.” Will snips.

Going to work with his uncle Jack was way less dull this time. Eight different people had given him high fives and Price had brought him a present wrapped in blue paper which Will had torn to pieces removing to find a copy of 1997's 'Guinness World Records' within.

So, all in all Will was very pleased with himself. He'd saved a lot of lives *and* he got a book to add to his collection. The women he sometimes saw when he accidently looked into the mirror when doing his teeth, face melted, mouth pulled to the side by the scaring as she screamed… that was a price worth paying.

The nightmares were harder. Sometimes he was the scared woman stabbing franticly at one of the many victims. Stabbing even after the body beneath him had stilled. Stabbing and stabbing and resting then stabbing some more. Breathless aching rage.

Other times he was the victim. Confused afraid, staring up at that face. Vaguely aware of the knife and the blood. The pain a strange far-off phantom forced to the back of his brain while he tried to fight. Finding himself weakening. Everything going black… he would awake covered in sweat either way it went. Shivering and needing a walk. At home he'd go out with Winston and wonder. The fairy-God-squirrel-or-what-ever-the-fuck-it-was close behind. No doubt reporting back to its master.

At his uncles he'd sit at the open window of his room and look up at the stars until he felt calm enough again to sleep.

But when ever he came back to weighing up whether he'd do it again he always concluded that he would. People's lives were saved, each of those people had a family that were saved. All of the victims had children whose childhood he'd saved. He had made the hard choice like his da always said to and he found himself proud. Even if his da wouldn't agree, his principles still did which was agreement enough for Will.

He stuck to the staff lunch room this time, until his uncle got him for lunch. They went out for that which was nice. Will hated being stuck *anywhere*. Still Jack claims it is too cold to sit outside, a sentiment that Will had never understood as he enjoyed the cold. So, they ate in a restaurant that his uncle liked and it was nice enough.

His uncle asked him about his book and when they arrived back his uncle took him for a walk outside before they went in. Price came to see him and they played chess. Will found that he liked Price, liked his quirky wit and lack of condescension that adults usually reserved for those shorter than them.

The aftermath of Wills talent being on display for his people to see had been hard to clean up. Still stopping the killer had been worth it. The saving of lives, the relief of victim's family's it *all* made it worth it.

Chasing down every last person who might have seen or heard something that could get back to Davis had been difficult. Still the team that he worked with had been carefully picked and their obedience to him fostered to precision. He'd done everything he could to prevent any leak that would endanger Will and so he found he could sleep at night with his decisions content with the knowledge it had been the right thing to do.

But as winter warms to spring a new killer takes over the papers and Jacks' life, which once again becomes a shit-show of horrific proportions. It'd be boring and everyday for an FBI agent if it wasn't so bloody sad.

The victims were mostly teenage girls, though a few were in their twenty's. All strangled to death, their bodies found hung from trees. Disturbing rag-doll like horror scenes for the early morning citizen out for their morning run. Shocking and so fast becoming a popular with every news paper within the state and some not.

All middle class, free spirits unimpeded yet by the horrors of the world… until they had been, completely.

The latest had been fourteen years old, happy, loved, full of life.

Talking to the parents was always a bit like lighting yourself on fire.

First the build-up of aching coldness as you drive to the address, dousing yourself in gasoline.

Knocking on the front door knowing what's going to happen, lighting a match.

They normally know something's not right when they open the door. Jack has schooled his ability in expressing as much as he can with out having to say a word. It makes it easier.

The Parents crumple.

He stays calm on the outside but inside he's turned to ashes. If any man on earth knows how horrible it is to lose a child it's Jack fucking Crawford. He sees it all the time. Heat and pain and fire in a thousand homes where he's gone up in smoke and gone home to his wife a little less of himself than the day before.

Standing in a blaze with a garden hose trying desperately to put out the flames, being tempted by the monsoon bucket was only reasonable… pre-emptive non-aggression of sorts.

The price was high. He knew that. He tossed and turned and wondered at night wondering if it weren't better to just keep lighting himself on fire. But it wouldn't save anyone. Will could save them. All the people not dead yet. All the family's happily living there lives unaware of the danger, they could keep on living the dream.

He had to sacrifice Will. He'd be setting his nephew alight instead of himself. A choice not made lightly.

But then he'd decided it was inevitable. He could go on doing what he was doing but when the body count got too high, he'd cave. He could hold out and let them die knowing he could stop it. He could let it happen so that when he did cave, he could tell himself he tried to use other means. But what kind of man would that make him?

For one family he'd not do it, but for five? Ten? More? How could he weight that many lives against the safety and happiness of one person? Did he feel guilty about it? *Yes*. Did he have to do it anyway? *Yes*.

If Bella or Ed ever found out … they'd never understand. How could they? How many times had they had to knock on a door and wait to burn? Hear the shrikes and pleading… the horror. Have it follow them into their dreams? Dead bodies and the ash they left in their wake.

So, it was inevitable he reasoned. That when Bella was next away for work and Ed needed someone to have Will that Jack did what he did. No point fighting the inevitable.

Chapter Thirteen: Litany on Fire

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of rape.
Racism.
Child abuse.
Vomit splatter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirteen

Litany on Fire

May 1997

Wolf Trap, Virginia

It was several more months before Bella was away again. Which gave Jack plenty of time to think on how was best to go about the thing.

Ed being Ed thanked him when he arrived to pick up Will. But Jack knew guilt well and pushed it aside, the guilt was worse turning up at another family's door. Two more families he'd had to visit while waiting for this opportunity to arrive.

If he'd been braver, he'd have done it several months back but then he'd have had to fight Ed and Bella at every turn. Also, he needed to make sure no one was about. Once was one thing but he didn't want to risk Davis finding out what Will could do. It was much too similar for comfort. Davis' current failures to secure his miracle man could mean he'd be much more likely to take Will in his stead… and despite what he was doing he did love his family.

But here he was smiling and chatting with Ed and acting like everything was normal. Will came running out with Winston as per usual.

The drive back to Baltimore was kept light with Will chatting away about his latest adventures with Winston. Jack making all the right noises whilst only half listening.

When they pulled into the parking lot Jack paused hands still gripping the steering wheel "Look kid…"

“It’s okay,” Will cut in “You need my help. I know.”

“Still stealing newspapers?” Jack asks.

Will shrugs “I won’t tell if you don’t.”

Jack twisted in his seat to look at Will “This isn’t like the last case.”

“I know.”

“There’s no going back from something like this. Some things will stay with you for the rest of your life. There are things you can’t unsee.”

“I *Know* uncle Jack. I’ve already seen things I can’t unsee. But I’ve helped more people than most my age and that’s a good thing I think.”

“If you keep this up, you’re going to help more people than most could ever dream of, me included,” Jack says proudly “You’re my very own hero Will.”

Will smiles “The hard choices are normally the right ones.”

“So, you *do* pay attention to your dad.” Jack says.

“Everyone thinks he’s a man of few words, but he loves to talk my ears of about what’s right and what’s not.” Will replies.

Jack barks out a laugh “He reserves that for family,” He ruffles Will’s hair with a twinkle in his eyes “He does it to me too.”

Inside they find the building echoey and empty. Will glances around for any one and see no one. “Where is everyone?” he asks curiously.

“Corporate team building.” Jack replies as they walk.

“What’s that?” Will asks.

“A bunch of people falling and a bunch of people catching them.” Jack replies.

“Huh?” Will asks confused.

“It’s meant to build trust,” Jack pauses and turns to look at Will seriously “We can give it a try if you want?”

Will shakes his head “I don’t think I could catch you, you’re a big man uncle Jack.”

Jack smiles “I had meant that I would be catching you… You *can* trust me to catch you if you need me to Will.”

“I know.” Will replies and they keep walking.

“Good,” Jack replies “because you’re going to need to tell me if this gets too much for you.”

They arrive in a large mostly empty room with a large table in the middle with multiple chairs surrounding it and a couch off to the side. Its lights are semi dimed since Will find's them painful at full intensity.

Already there are Price and a tall thin man in a suit. The man stands and reaches out his hand to shake Jacks.

"Will, this is Dr Abrams, a friend and consultant psychiatrist who has helped us on numerous cases over the years."

Dr Abrams is dressed neatly and looks down at Will like one would a small insect and Will knows without having to look that he does not like this man. So, he *does* look. Stares the man right back in the eyes and sees what there is to see.

"And this must be the famous Will!" Dr Abrams says and reaches out his hand for Will to shake.

Will looks a moment longer, to clarify, to *understand* and then ignores the offered hand with a little grimace and turns around and wonders to a chair to take a seat.

"Will doesn't always do handshakes." Jack supplies and heads over to take a seat also.

"Okay." Dr Abrams says "That's okay, Will might not see the point in it." Then he sits down as well.

"Exactly." Will replies "and I'm normally right."

Jack frowns at Will wondering what happened to his usually mostly friendly nephew.

Dr Abrams nods and smiles at Will who is looking at the ceiling like it just became interesting. "You know what? Your right, why *do* we do that? Because we were taught too, it's the polite thing to do but most of us don't know *why* we do it, just that we *do*."

"I hope you're not planning an educational monologue on shaking hands for me." Will says in a board voice.

"No, I can see that you believe it's a pointless ritual."

"That's because it is." Will says.

"I suppose it matters less now than it used to…"

"And yet you'll one of those guys that will just keep on keeping on for old times' sake. You'll just keep shaking other people's hands about in a pointless social ritual well into the future." Will is making sure not to look his uncle's way.

"Any way," Jack says before the conversation can continue "That's a topic for another time."

Dr Abrams nods in agreement "You seem to be a boy who knows his own mind. It's nice to see in someone so young. Your family must be very proud."

“We are,” Says Jack seriously “more and more every day.”

Dr Abrams nods “Ah yes. Your Uncle Jack, aren’t you?”

Jack nods and leans forward with a small smile "it's been quite the adventure I can tell you."

“You must be related through your wife?” the doctor asks curiously.

“No, Ed, that’s Wills dad, is my brother.” Jack supplies.

Will loses interest in the roof and stars watching the conversation with interest.

Abram’s looks briefly between the two and nods “Okay. Not much of a resemblance, but that happens.” He says with an edge of curiosity in his voice.

Jack raises his eyebrows at the man “We grew up together…” he elaborates.

“Ahhhh…” Says Abrams’ “Now it’s making sense.”

“Why?” Will asks sharply eyes intent on Abrams.

Jack looks unimpressed as he motions Abrams to take the question.

“Well… it was only that you might say that you too don’t look related. I was working out the connection. It’s a family connection but not a genetic one which explains it.”

Will glares at him. “we’re related in all the ways that count.”

“Yes Will.” Jack says and is about to re-direct the conversation when Abrams continues.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying. Related, just not genetically.”

“Because I’m white?” Will asks intently and Jack sits back looking at Will with a face schooled to blankness to hide what Will knows is irritation becoming something more volatile, but he can’t bring himself to stop now he’s started.

Abrams is shaking his head and looking between the two of them “No! *of course not* Will. I would *never* say that! It was just an observation. I'm trying to get to know you, make connections about who you are and your...”

“Are you a racist, doctor?” Will asks with a slight angle to his head.

“No! no… of course not!”

“You think I can’t be genetically related to Uncle Jack because I’m white…”

“Well….” The man looked at Jack who remained expressionless and unhelpful “Logically you *can’t* be…”

“You think I’m unworthy of Uncle Jack because I’m white?” Will asks.

“What! NO! NO! definitely not! That’s *not* what I said…” Abrams looks helplessly at Jack who is becoming colder by the moment, then seeing no help coming laughs nervously “Quite the opposite Will I think your…”

“Really?” Will asks.

“Yes! I’m not that sort of person, maybe we got off on the wrong foot as they say? You clearly seem to have gotten the wrong picture of me…”

“So, you think Uncle Jack isn’t’ worthy of me then?” Will asks, voice quiet. Somehow it still manages to echo around the room. His eyes flash with some sort of eerie unexplainable light for a second and Jack is suddenly reminded that he has no idea what Will *is*.

Jack frowns as a strange cold starts to creep across the room. He looks at Will who is looking… wrong, like he’s underwater. Floating somehow where he sits; his hair spread out around his face like seaweed caught in the waves of the sea.

Jack can hear a strange whisper start behind him. It goes from one side of the room to the other like a thousand blades of grass, and with it the smell of spring “*Aodh.”* The voice whispers to him and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

Jack turns his head to see where it could be coming from, but it is just the four of them alone in the room.

“What! No that’s NOT what I said” The doctor raises his hands and looks at Jack “No.” he adds emphatically.

“Then why did you say ‘*quite the opposite’*.” Will asks and a large cracking sound echoes through the room, the floor shudders slightly underfoot.

“I..I..I..” Abrams looks lost for words and only half awake as he turns his head to the side a frown on his face “do you hear that? A voice?”

Jack gives Will a stern look “Will” he says gruffly trying to put a fast end to whatever it was going on.

Will turns on him next all anger “But *he’s a racist*!” Will yells and suddenly the cold is gone and Jack and Abrams snap back to full wakefulness. “*I saw*!”

“Is that right?” Jack asks Will while looking at Abrams with raised eyebrows as he reassesses his friend.

“He hates that you’re in a position of power! Hates that your higher up the pecking order than him.”

Abrams looks shocked at the allegations “No…No…” he looks at Jack imploringly “Honestly Jack! We know each other.”

“He hates that you give the orders, thinks it goes against the *natural order* of things.” Will continues his voice seething but quiet.

Jack holds up his hand for Will to stop and lets out a harsh breath “No psychiatrist then…” then he turns his eyes on Will “since you *obviously don’t want one.*”

Doctor Abrams looks between them incredibly “I’m not racist… you know me, Jack.”

Jack nods “But more importantly I know Will” He sighs “Your fired.” Then he waves his hand at the man to leave.

Abrams stays siting his eyes on Will “you… you? What *are* you?”

“Effective Immediately Doctor.” Jack says loudly.

Dr Abrams shakes his head “But I’ve been helpful to you for all these years” he says “we’re friends! I’ve even had you over for dinner with my family!”

Jack suddenly looks thunderous “OUT! NOW!” he shouts.

Dr Abrams stands his arms held out as if to placate “that came out wrong.” he says.

“OUT!” Jack shouts again.

“Right… Sorry… Bye.” Then he leaves looking back briefly at Will a frown on his face.

When he’s gone Jack turns his glare on Will “Happy?” he asks.

Will nods silently and Price takes the doctors seat “Wouldn’t have picked it” Price mutters.

“You’d be surprised.” Jack replies

“I expect I would,” price says “I’m…”

“*DO NOT* apologize!” Jack says angrily “*Not unless you want to join him*.”

Price nods and goes silent.

“Good.” Says Jack “Let's have an early morning tea. See you in an hour.”

Price nods and makes a quick exit not even looking back.

Jack leans back in his chair and rubs his hand over his eyes “I suppose you’ll manage to find a problem with any psychiatrist I bring in?”

Will shrugs “Don’t need one.”

“No, you don’t *want* one, there is a difference.” Jack snaps “how am I supposed to look out for you if you sabotage every attempt I make?”

“I won’t if it’s you, and Price can be here if he wants, he’s okay, he gave me a book.” Will says nonchalantly.

“*And if I’m not enough?*” Jack asks his brows furrowed with worry.

“We don’t know you’re not.” Will says without pause.

“So, wait, and see? is that your big idea?” Jack asks in frustration.

Will nods.

Jack sighs “and I know you don’t normally look with someone you’ve just met. You did that on purpose.”

Will shrugs “I hoped he had a secret.”

“Of course, you did,” Jack shakes his head “Did you consider… even for a second how that would make me feel?”

Will becomes interested in the ceiling again.

“Will?”

Will shrugs “Your tough.”

“So?”

“You can handle *anything*.” Will says with the confidence of someone that hero worships their uncle. Jack could admit it felt good to be thought of like that. As long as he didn't let Will know that. Will who needed a firm hand at times.

“That doesn’t mean that I want to.” He says to Will.

Will deflates a little “Sorry” he says.

Jack nods “then let’s not have a repeat of whatever the hell that was.”

Will nods “I *am* sorry, and it wasn’t just that I wanted to get rid of him. When I saw I was mad, *very mad*, I wanted to hurt him to humiliate him.”

“I understand that your feelings were hurt and maybe a bit of your pride. But next time you pull me aside and talk to me like a big boy. No need for the show.” Jack says.

Will nods “I just wanted *him* to prove it.”

“No excuses Will, show me some respect. I’ll trust you if you trust me. Deal?”

Will nods, then after a moment “but it *is* better to know?” he asks tentatively.

Jack nods “I had that jackass over to my house for dinner, let him meet Bella.”

Will laughs “Aunt Bella would have wrapped him up on a verbal skewer and spat him out.”

“If she’d known,” Jack says, “I hope I don’t need to tell you not to tell her about this?”

“No.” Will answers.

“And you understand why?” Jack asks.

Will nods solemnly.

“Good.”

Will starts to fidget “I *am* sorry Uncle Jack, I was wrong. I didn’t think it through like I should have. I’m thinking about it now and I’m sorry for making a game of it.”

Jack nods “think first next time, saves the time it takes to apologize.”

Will nods “okay.” he says quietly.

Jack sighs “look kid, you’re doing well. But you can’t go around playing games with people’s feelings like that. Especially without good reason. You didn’t want a psychiatrist; I can understand that. But what you did was wrong, and you knew it and *did it anyway*. Now you’ve said you're sorry and I believe you, but what does your da always say about apologies?”

“That they mean I’ll do my darndest to never do it again,” Will says and looks at his uncle “Next time I’ll talk to you. Next time I’ll do better.”

Jack nods pleased “All forgiven, and to be fair I’m just as angry with myself.”

“I’d be angry with you too if I were you.” Will says with a smirk.

Jack snorts.

“Why’d you keep him around so long anyway? If he was good at his job, you wouldn’t need me.” Will says.

“*No one* can do what you do… also he was very eager to help and would come in right away whenever I called which is very useful, most are not so keen.”

“If you wanted a dog, you should have told me Uncle Jack, I’d have lent you Winston.” Will says deadpan.

“Very funny, you have your dads’ humor.” Jack says “Still, I can admit that it would have been better from the start to have someone better qualified, his qualifications were iffy but I didn't care at first, I just wanted the job done. From now on I'll make sure I get people that come with credible recommendations.”

“Better confident than compliant.” Will says.

“Sometimes I forget you’ve just turned twelve.”

“I don’t know how. We had my birthday dinner at your house just last week.”

“Ha, ha,” Jack says “maybe keep your day job. Comedy’s one thing that you’re not as good at as you think you are.”

Will smiles at him that blinding smile that Jack sometimes wants to bottle and then Price walks back in carrying a tray of sandwiches and three glasses of water which he places on the table for them to pick at. He also has a pitcher with water which he puts aside “in case Will needs help waking up.” He supplies.

The three of them sit in silence for a bit munching on the sandwiches which Price had removed from plastic containers and arranged neatly on the plate even though it couldn’t change the fact that they tasted like they’d come out of a packet. They ate out of something to do for a few moments more. Spanning out the time a little more before the calm, now returned, would fall away to messiness and pain.

Jack solidified the memory of Wills smile in his mind. Unsure of when or if he’d ever see it again. Then he had Price take away the tray and placed the file on the table along with a tape recorder.

Jack push’s the record button with a click and the tape starts turning.

“When you’re ready take a look,” Jack says “tell me anything you think, anything that comes to mind. But if at any time you find it too much we stop. Right then and there. You understand me Will?”

Will nods and runs his hands over the outside of the file. It’s thick. There are others he knows, to much has happened to fit in only one. This would be a summary of the most relevant facts and photos.

Will grounds his elbows painfully into the table, takes a breath and opens the folder.

At first his eyes flicker over the words, taking them in with understanding and speed beyond his age. They help with some blanks. Help at least a little. But to really see he knows he’s going to have to *look*.

He feels it now. The dread building. The lady in the mirror looks at him in pity, telling him if he was her boy, she’d have taken such good care of him. Would have ripped his mother’s chest apart with a dozen thrusts of a knife for leaving him. Telling him how Kate had never deserved him.

The boys all sad, rage-filled wretches beating at the ground, tearing at there own faces, raging against the world for ever having let that monster exist in the same space as them. They feel like they are dead, but they aren’t dead. Just wondering why, they live at all.

His da looks at him with worry even when the bear has gone. His da smiles at him but he smells of fear, it drifts off him in slow swirls. The bear in his da’s mind, that’s never left, still following them about since that day by the river as they fled from place to place. Hunted.

He knows they’ll be there as well. These girls he doesn’t know. They’ll walk with him now as well. He’ll see them and know them better than anyone had when they were alive. They’d stay alive in his mind visiting him in dreams.

The photos are many. Lacerations, bruises. Crying, begging, terror.

Desperate attempts to gulp down air. Desperate attempts to live. strangled painful hope and is even more devastating death.

Desperation, terror, pain, horror. Thoughts of family and friends blinking across their minds, regretting the pain they know they'll feel when... Regretting never seeing them again. They'll never see how it ends for them. Never know them as they'll be. Never grow up. Never, never, never… Pain and fear and loss and panic, and panic and hope and panic and hope and panic and the quiet and cold and bitterness of a frozen wasteland that's burning them up. Pain. Pain. Pain. Death.

"Its not just murder. It's sadistic. A slow death. they're allowed to take a breath and then not then again and again. A beating and a slow suffocation and rape." Will is shaking, he looks up and realizes he is clutched in Jacks arms.

"I didn't do it." Will suddenly says wracked with remorse and guilt.

"No, you didn't." Jack agrees as if from afar.

Will is trembling. "I wouldn't do that."

"I know you wouldn't" Jack is hushing him with surprising gentleness.

"I didn't like it." Will whispers and then he's sobbing.

Jack says nothing more, instead he rocks Will back and forth his head pressed into his shoulder.

After Will and Jack have both calmed, Jack places Will back into his chair. Price hands Jack something.

"Here, take these." Jack coaches and bands Will a glass of water and some paracetamol.

"My head." Will mutters.

"I know." Jack says.

Will takes the medicine with out complaint and gulps down some water. Then closing his eyes, he leans forward crossing his arms on the table and berrying his face in his arms. Its dark there. Quiet. Life floating in a river…

The sun is overhead. The water is alive about him and he inhales the fresh air into his lungs gladly. His da is there as well, in the swirls of blue and chittering fish. Safe. Calm. Happy…

"Will?"

"Will?"

Will looks at his da "Yeah?"

"Time to come back?" His da says seriously.

“Huh?” Will asks.

“We need more, I’m sorry.”

Will is shaking again, he opens his eyes and looks up at his uncle. At reality. The terrible mess of life.

“Huh?” He asks.

“I’m sorry Will.”

“It’s okay. I’m okay.” Will says and sits back into his chair trying to catch his brain back up to reality.

“My feet are wet.” Will says confusedly “from the river.”

“Will? Are you okay?” Jack is looking at him closely “maybe we should have a break.”

“No.” Will says “If we stop… I’ll never do it again and I *can’t* let him get away with it. You have to stop him.”

Jack looks him over one more time “All right, when you’re ready” he says with a click the tape recorder continues to record.

The gears swapping tape from one side to the next in a mesmerizing circle that Will appreciates. He could watch it for hours he decides and starts talking.

“He watches them, they all have fenced back yards.” He says first, as easy place to start.

“He’s not exactly angry with the girls themselves. He see’s them more as a symptom of a world he hates. He’s loved girls like these or at least he thinks he has. But they never loved him back.”

Jack nods for him to continue “First what we know of him.”

“He’s smart. But never went anywhere in life like he thought he should have. Lives in the same town he grew up in. He works in a large building, steal and glass. Sorting envelopes, watching people stupider than him succeeding. He hates them, he brings them their mail but they don’t even see him. He’s invisible, he doesn’t mater to any of them. Didn’t matter. He does now. He’s made sure of it.”

Will pauses and covers his eyes with his hands. “Now he’s the successful one, more famous than anyone in that ruddy building. More important. He’s not invisible now. Everyone has herd of him. Now he walks those halls delivering mail and hears the small brained imbeciles around him talking about *him*, *The hangman*. He walks right past them and they don’t even know it.”

Will grimaces “He loves that. He’s been holding back from choosing one of their daughters. It could lead someone back to him. But still, he really wants to, he doesn’t know how much longer he can hold off.”

“Can you tell me anything else about the building he works in?” Jacks voice is all business now.

“It sticks out, taller than the buildings around it. Black glass, lots of it. A large yellow Q on the side of the building.”

“Good, very good Will.”

“He enters through the back, takes the bus to work and home again.”

“What about his home Will? Anything you can remember would help.” Jack continues.

Will nods, eyes clenched tightly closed. “He lives with others… family, I think. A lady and man and two small children. He hates them all. But he has nowhere else to go. He sleeps in a camper parked by the drive…” Wills breathing becomes erratic, afraid.

“Will?” Jack asks cautiously.

Will opens his eyes “Is it enough?” He asks voice now small.

“Yes, we can work of what you’ve given us. But if there is anything else that might be helpful, the more we have the quicker we can stop him and I know you want to stop him as quickly as I do.” Jack says.

Will eyes the photos spread out on the table and nods, closing his eyes again.

“He takes the bus to work. But he hires a vehicle each time he’s going to…”

“Hires from the same place?” Jack cuts in.

“No, from all over.”

“Okay.” Jack says.

“He drives them to a different spot. Isolated. He sometimes lets them get away so he can chase them. He likes it when they feel like they can get away. But he is faster and stranger and smarter. They all have hope they’ll escape and he loves to destroy that hope.”

“But he doesn’t kill them there?” Price prompts earning himself a glare from Jack.

“No. he… he strangles them there while he’s… he’s.” Will swallows and starts to shake again.

“Its okay we know.” Jack says “Move on.”

“But he always lets them go so they can breathe. Then he does it again and again. Over and over.” Will is crying now, tears run down his face and collect on his chin. His hair is damp with sweat. He is pale and sick looking.

Jack hates what this is doing to him but not enough to stop it. Someone will die if he stops this. A girl will die. Maybe more. He has no choice but to let Will suffer.

“He binds their wrists. Blindfolds them and gags them. Then places one end of the noose around their neck and tells them he’s going to let them go.” Will is shaking his head in a rhythmic pattern that Jack suspects is for comfort as much as anything else.

“He lays them down on the back seat. Tells them to be quiet and still and he’ll drop them off somewhere. He’ll let them go home. But if they cry out or try and move too much, he’ll cut them wide open and feed them to his pigs…. He doesn’t have pigs though.”

“They are good. Hopeful. They do as they are told and stay quiet as he leads them like lambs to the slaughter.” A sob escapes Will then and his hands ball into fists that he smacks against his forehead.

Price makes to take a hold of them, to stop Will harming himself but Jack puts up his hand to stop him and he sits back down eyebrows raised in worry.

“He takes their blind folds off when he’s already got his rope over the pre choses branch. He pulls it around so she can see it. She doesn’t understand right away. Doesn’t get the chance because he pulls it tight before she can scream. He likes it how their body’s dance and twitch. So, he waits until they go still, then he ties the rope off and leaves.”

Will takes some deep breaths and opens his mouth to continue but instead he vomits. Splatters of bitter smelling liquid and blobs of undigested sandwiches splatters all over the floor and on the table and the photos and on Jack who is leaning right up to Will. Luckily, he manages to shield the tape recorder in time.

Jack sighs.

Price recoils and grimaces.

“Price.” Jack snaps.

Price huffs, mutters something about job description but gets up to get a mop and bucket all the same.

Jack rubs Wills back, but can’t stop him self from asking “Any clues from what you’ve seen of a description of our guy?”

Will shakes his head. But then nods “he’s white, has black hair on his hands, its long. His hands are big.”

“Anything else?” Jack continues.

“I could… but I. Can’t. Sorry.” Will is crying and hunching in on himself. “He only lets them see his face when… when he’s hanging them…. I… I don’t want to die.” Will says.

“No.” Jack reassures “I won’t ask you to do that.”

Will leans back and brings his legs up to his chest. Closing his eyes, he takes a step back into the river.

Jack switches off the tape recorder, sighs heavily again and watches Price start to clean up the sick.

Chapter End Notes

Hope no one is too offended by this. If you are please leave me a comment to let me know and I will reply with an apology. If you make a good point I might even change the story.

Chapter Fourteen: We all fall down

Chapter Notes

> For Mewtho9. Who always comments and probably has been waiting for this for a long time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Fourteen

We all fall down

New Orleans

1970

“Excited?” His mama asked him twisted around in the front seat.

Jack frowned at her “No, I liked it here.”

“Come on Jack, it’ll be fun you’ll see, I hear they get to go on a field trip every other week.”

Jack frowned at her and went back to staring out the window.

“You don’t know how lucky you are to get an opportunity such as this.” His da said seriously “If I had been so lucky as you at your age, I wouldn’t have been sulking about like you.”

“I’m not sulking.” Jack said.

“So, you say,” said mama “Then put that lip away and cheer up.”

Jack did.

“This family is built upon hard work jack. Do you think it was easy for your mama and da to become lawyers? No, not for a second, but we did it and if we can you can son.” His da said.

“Yes sir.” Jack said miserably and picked up the pamphlet next to him on Baltimore’s Specialized School for the Gifted and Exceptional.

Sssssssqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqwwwwweeeeeeeeeek SMASH whirl RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNNNNNNNG BANG.

Black.

Black.

Black.

Black.

Black.

Black.

Pain. Confusion. Lights. Pain.

“Jack Crawford?”

“Jack?”

“Hurts.” He managed to push out.

“It will son, we’ll get the nurses on getting you something more for the pain.”

Jack could start to see a man standing over him with a light.

“Do you know where you are?”

Jack frowned and tried to remember.

“I was in the car with my mama and da. We were moving to Baltimore” he said.

“That’s right Jack, you were.”

“Where am I? where’s mama?” He asked and tried to look around, but halted when the jarring pain hit him.

“Just lie still for a bit for me. You are in New Orleans St Josephs Hospital and it is the 23rd of June. You have been in a car accident. Your injuries are moderate and you should make a full recovery in time.”

Jack could make out the man properly now. A doctor and the shuffling about of others in the room.

“I want my mom.” Jack tried again. “Please can you get her?”.

The doctor pulls up a chair next to him “I’m sorry son. You’re the only one that came out of that accident alive.”

Wolf Trap, Virginia

May 1997

Ed wakes with a start.

Screaming, high pitched and terrified echoed in his ear drums. Winston barking and the sound of birds. Thousands of birds so loud it was rattling his skull and nerves.

“WILL?” he yells and leaps to his feet.

“WILL?” he shouts into his son’s room but there is only an empty bed and an open window.

He runs, heart pounding down stairs, slams on the lights and runs out the front door to see Will standing frozen in the middle of a swirling mass of birds twisting up, up, up into the sky.

He takes a moment to understand what is happening. But he keeps on trying and failing so instead he strides forward. “*Will?*” he tries when he is closer.

Will can not hear him, he is sure of that. Will is screaming, a shrill other worldly scream.

Birds which should be roosting, thousands it looks, are instead acting as some sort of physical manifestation of Will’s terror.

“WILL!” He cries out as he draws near.

But there is no reaction.

He reaches out to touch Wills shoulder gently, to try and comfort. But instead, the birds flock him in a terrifying whirl wind of sharp beaks and claws which forces him to hunch over on the wet grass screaming as well. Trying to cover his face with his hands. Trying to keep himself safe while refusing to leave Will. He reaches out for Will and finds his bear foot.

He grips the foot and screams again “WILL! SON! I’M HERE! ITS OKAY!”

Silence. Then Plod. Plod. Plodplodplodplodplodplodplodplodplod.

The birds are falling from the sky and landing on the ground with sickening thuds.

They land on him. On his back, on his legs, On his out stretched arm. Beside him, all around him. But Will isn’t screaming any more.

He stands up and wraps his arms around Will to shield him from the falling birds with his back and curls them onto the ground.

Wills body is limp in his arms until it isn't.

Then its rigid and shaking.

The last bird lands with a thud on the ground, dead.

Ed gathers Will up into his arms and runs back into the house and into the kitchen where the phone is. He picks it up and dials Jack before sliding down the wall still holding Will's shaking body. Winston is there, tale between his legs. He looks as afraid as he is.

Ring ring.

Ring ring.

Ring ring.

Ring ring.

Will is still shaking, and strangely stiff in his arms.

Ring ring.

Click "This better be good…."

"*Jack it's Will*, he's having a seizure and *I don't know what to do!*"

"Ed?"

"He needs help! Please hurry, I can't lose him."

"I'll get help. Just whatever you do *don't* ring nine-one-one!" Jack replies and hangs up.

Ed feels himself let go of the phone, and hears it clank onto the floor.

Will shudders again and again and then flops into stillness.

Ed braces his hands on his chest to feel it move… it does.

He clutches Will close and waits for help.

He waits and waits. An hour comes and goes and Ed stars to sob. Will is pale and damp. Covered in sweat. His body is limp and hot. So hot. So unlike Will.

Will hadn't been sick for a day in his life. Not *one* day. Something was very wrong.

Will still doesn't respond when Ed calls his name.

Winston has curled up with his head resting on Ed's leg watching Will. Ed knows when they arrive when Winston sits up and looks towards the drive.

After that they arrive in droves.

They enter the house, doctors and men with guns.

“You need to hand him over sir.” They say when they try to take Will from him and he keeps a hold on instinct. He has to force his fingers to uncurl from Will’s pajama top.

A man in a suit is there asking him questions about what happened there but he ignores the man stepping around him to follow the doctors. He doesn’t want to let Will out of his sight.

But then Will is placed into a black van and when Ed tries to follow, he is grabbed by his arms and dragged back. He’s yelling but no one is listening. “That’s my son!” he’s screaming “I have to go with him, that’s my boy!” Then the van door closes and he loses sight of Will altogether.

He fights.

“LET GO OF ME!”

He’s twisting and trying to slam the hands that hold him away, but then his face is on the ground and he’s dazed the taste of dirt in his mouth, where his teeth have ground into to ground.

The van is disappearing.

It’s gone. And he is hefted up and taken to a black sedan and placed in the back seat. Some how his hands are cuffed though he doesn’t remember it happening. The door is locked when he tries it. He has no choice but to wait.

That’s when he starts to notice the state of there house and the land surrounding it.

Piles of dead birds.

Some piled up several feet. Heads and body’s twisted and mangled.

With a jolt he sees it’s not just birds. Predominantly birds yes. But not just birds.

Of in the distance, he sees the body of a fox. Its tongue hangs out, its eyes are open and lifeless. And closer to the car a large rabbit lies and buzzing around the animals in hazmat suits are a fifty strong group taking photos and samples and talking to each other.

Will has opened his window for Zane (what he’s named his fairy-squirrel-mother). But unlike every other night he does not come.

Will tries to quietly (so as not to alert his dad) call for him. But there is no sign of the creature he has come to love.

Will tells himself that such creatures are wilder than the wildest animals. It is not a tame thing. Not a thing to be relied upon.

He falls into a fretful sleep all the same.

There is a shadow. A man black as ink with sharp antlers upon his head and eyes blacker than the blackest ink or sky that Will has ever seen. He is afraid of this man. There is something terrible about him, it bleads out of the man into the world around him darkening the ground on which he stands. He is not like any of the creatures he has met before.

Slowly the world surrounding them comes into focus. He knows where he is by the shape and size of the trees alone. He is in Sathurl.

Trees so large and thick they dwarf the buildings built around them, thick brunches the spread out and touch each other to form a canopy roof that can not be seen through to the sky above.

Buildings of stone and wood with high arching rooves and twisting walk ways all connected in winding turret like structures that twist with no end upwards. Then where the trees break to let the night sky in a castle of black set against the busyness of a million of stars.

Creatures unlike anything on earth wonder the streets. Monstrous looking creatures with scales and horns and teeth. Sharp claws, sharp eyes, sharp minds staring back at him. Some look almost human. Some not at all.

They are surrounded by what Will recognizes as the king's guard.

Tall thin human like beings with black skin and three sets of arms. One set that look almost normal. One set that are long and vine like with long twig like fingers meant for grabbing and not letting go, and one pair that are sharp like a blade and long enough to spear an elephant. There faces are long and eyes enormous. They have no nose, and have a mouth that opens from where the nose should be to its chin. Vertically. It looks unnatural and strange.

But none of them frighten Will like this new creature. There is something terrible about it.

"So, it is true," the creature says, his voice rattles the ground and sends a hum through Will's skin. "Aodh is here, traversing Sathurl in his dreams. But as you can see Sathurl belongs to me now. I am its rightful king returned as I would always be, to the clanging of the wind bearing news of…"

It steps forward towering above Will and grips his chin "*you*".

Chapter End Notes

guys any typos or other problems please let me know.
other than that, I hope you enjoyed it.

Chapter Fifteen: The Age of Lugh

Chapter Notes

> Mewtho9 I'm going to name a character after you. Since you seem to be the stories biggest fan. :) if that is okay of course? also still planning to use tornado of death, but everything always takes longer to write than I think it will....

Chapter Fifteen

The Age of Lugh

New Orleans

1970

Edward always came to breakfast early to avoid the other boys. None of them liked him, he was too short and too skinny and too smart for his own good. But this morning was different, there was another boy there also. Edward looked at him for a second and walked over.

“Your new.” He said as way of greeting.

The boy didn’t look up, just nodded.

Edward could see the pain etched into this kid so he sat down.

“I’m Edward Murray, been here in and out for years.” He said and began eating.

The other boy didn’t respond.

“I can see you’ve had a rough time of it so I don’t expect you to talk. But that’s okay since I can do enough of the talking for the both of us,” he eyed the boy “are you eight? You look eight. I’m eight as of last month.”

The boy shook his head.

“Older?” Edward asked.

The boy shook his head again.

"*Younger?"* Edward asked in surprise since the other boy was large, larger than the other eight-year-olds for sure.

The boy nodded.

"Seven?"

The boy shook his head again.

"Six?" Edward asked not concealing his surprise.

The boy nodded.

"I have to tell you new boy, you don't look six. You're a big boy no doubt."

The boy just shrugged.

"hmmmm I could use a friend like you. Big boy. I get all the whack downs around here I tell you what. Got a smart mouth that no one likes so it happens but I'd prefer it not… so want to be friends?"

The boy shrugs.

"That means yes as far as I'm concerned," he saw the boy had some tears on his face "Since we friends, I'll give you a bit of advice, around here you don't show you're tears or you'll get torn to pieces. You got me?"

The boy nodded and used his sleeve to wipe his face.

"Good, now eat, got to keep your strength up for when the other boys come to pound on you."

Jack picked up a piece of cold toast and began chewing.

"That's it big boy, It'll all be okay you'll see." Edward said. "You're not all alone in this world. You got a friend now and I'm going to make sure you're okay."

Sathurl

Age of Lugh

Will looked up into the creature's face, right into its eyes. He looked but like every time he had looked in Sathurl he could not see more than anyone. It was both disconcerting when it was needed and a relief when it was not.

"You're not the king." Was what came out of Wills mouth. He cringed inside. But his dream-self was less sharp and more hazy than his waking-self. It was harder to think and easier to react, a dangerous combo in a place like this.

The creature let go of his chin and raised an eyebrow in what Will hoped was amusement and not anger. It was harder to tell in Sathurl as the people tended towards rapid changes in states of emotion and intention.

"The age of Haben is over, though he was never a true king. Haben was merely another steward in a line of stewards."

"What happened to him?" Will asked curiously.

"We had him for dinner. He had the honor of being prepared by myself, an honor he did not earn." The king smiled and Will stepped back being suddenly reminded of a shark. "You visited him here often?"

"Sometimes." Will replied. "You think eating the king, steward, whatever, was a sort of kindness?" Will asked incredulously.

A small tilt of the king's head gave not much away but Will hoped the conversation was going well. One thing he had learnt in his trips to Sathurl was to keep the locals interested. When they grew board of you, they grew dangerous, and being surrounded by kings guard was never a good spot to be in.

"You do not?"

Will shook his head "If you ever want to do something nice for me, please just give me a book or something, anything really. I'm not that fussy, just don't eat me."

A small smile appeared on the kings' lips then. This smile was less shark-like, and some how Will found comfort in it.

"I would never think of it." The king leant forward "It would be such a waste."

"Thanks. I won't eat you either then." Will says and smiles back.

The king blinks. His eyes rove over Will intently "I wonder what your true form will be."

Will is confused "huh?"

"Your human form, as charming as it is, is merely a cocoon. It is not your true form, that will be something truly unique to behold I imagine son-of-three-of-three."

"What does that even mean?" Will asks hoping that he might get some answers even if he might not remember them when he wakes.

“Brandubh is as helpful as ever I see.” The king said “come princeling walk with me.” Then he turned and began to walk, the kings guard that surrounding him moved with him. Will looked quickly around for a hole big enough for him to slip through, but with the vine like second arms the kings guard had, there was no escape. So, he took a breath and began to walk also. Playing for time until he woke up.

“I am Lugh. King of Sathurl. Tell me Aodh, what is your human name?”

Will felt prickles on his skin. A sort of scream from under his scalp. He thought, no knew, he should not tell this king, Lugh or whatever he called himself, his human name.

“Aodh is my name.” He said instead knowing it to be true. “That’s all you need to know I think.”

The king stopped and turned towards Will with such speed and power that he knew only fear as the creature king’s hands held either side of his head in a painful grip. His eyes were an inch In front of his and a wave of terror filled his body and he felt his body begin to shake. “Stop.” He cried “please.”

“You wish to keep secrets from me princeling. But you will learn it is not wise, it is my right to know all of you, and I will.”

Will found his voice straining in a cry that thrashed its way outside of his body and echoed into the enormous trees of the city, the trees awoke in pain and cried back one to the other, lifting to the sky a horrible crescendo which caused leaves to start raining down on them from above.

The king stepped back in surprise, Will fell forward onto the ground. But the king was turning to look at the trees, who were still howling. To the creatures on the streets whom had fallen to their knees. To the king’s guard who were gripping with there root arms into the ground for stability. The king tilted his head, intrigued.

When the last echo had faded, and Will was trying to stumble back upon his feet the king once again gripped the princelings chin in his hand.

“You cannot keep secrets from the darkest parts of your own mind Aodh, that is where I live.”

Around them the creatures were regaining their footing. The trees and ceased there screams. but above them the leaves still fell. Torrents of them dancing about as if a great wind had swept them up. Each leaf with its own light and own name, each one humming with life and hope. They rained down, down, down called to the ground by Aodh.

Called to awaken and grow.

Undisclosed Location

May 1997

Will was laid out on a bed with wires brunching out to machines surrounding him. He looked small and broken. It was scared him right to the bone but Jack couldn't risk letting Davis see his fear. It wouldn't help Will.

"Where's Ed?" he asks Davis.

"Detained."

"*Detained where*?"

Davis looked at him "Don't get your self all worked up my friend. Edward Graham will be fine. It's Will I'm worried about."

Jack turned towards him in surprise "Don't try and tell me you care." He said scathingly.

Davis raised an eyebrow at Jack "Do you think I'd have gone through all the trouble I have over the years if I didn't?"

Jack snorted and went to start speaking but Davis raised a hand to stop him "If all I wanted to do was hide what we've done all I'd have had to do was put a bullet between his eyes the night we found him."

Jack nodded "I have no doubt, but I know you too well Davis, it's not that you care about the kid. You care about what he can do. About whether your investment has paid off."

"Are you going to tell me it hasn't?" Davis asked "You've certainly found my investment useful over at the FBI."

Jack frowned at him "I don't know what you're getting at."

Davis laughed and patted Jack on the shoulder "I thought I taught you how to lie better than that."

"And I still don't…"

"It doesn't matter. What you say or what you don't say. I know how you've solved those most recent two cases. Which means Will might be the key to finding our informant after all."

"And after he's found him?" Jack asks

“From what I’ve seen he’s as good of an asset as our informant will be. Don’t worry Jack your little nephew isn’t in danger from me. He’s in danger from something else entirely.”

“He’s still alive.” Jack half states and half questions.

“Depends on your definition. His body is still alive, but he’s brain dead. Which is something that’s never been seen before, since it’s scientifically impossible. If your brain dies so does your body their connected and one can’t survive without the other. But looks like our boy is the exception to the rule. We’re hoping he’ll keep being the exception to the rule and switch his brain back on eventually without compromising any of the things that make him unique.”

“You think it’s likely to happen?” Jack asked as a searing hope sped through his chest.

“There’s still blood flow, his hearts still working fine, just no brain activity. My guys are having a lot of trouble wrapping their minds around it. He shouldn’t exist, even with a pretender involved it’s not possible. Almost like magic.”

Jack snorts at the idea “Do we know what happened? What caused it?” Jack asks opting for a change in topic.

“Will’s been having night terrors since the ‘hang man case’. Screaming the house down and seeing nooses hanging everywhere.” He pauses and raises an eye brow at Jack “Well done Uncle Jack.”

Jack cringes inside but remains stoic in the face of Davis’ words.

“There’s been smaller incidents all week during his sleep. Birds flying at the house at speed and breaking their necks, Ed even claims to have herd wolves howling out side the house one night.” Davis continues.

“And you believe him?” Jack asks

“At this point, I do. Edwards a complicated man, but he’s not a liar, lacks the imagination. There’s something more to all of this, to Will. I don’t know how in gods name he was made. But this goes well beyond what we were told he could be capable of.”

“What exactly did the informant say he could do?”

“He was purposely vague. But I know they were trying to make super soldiers of some kind and Wills ability’s when we tested him confirmed that theory. But maybe that’s just what our informant wanted us to think.”

“You think we were manipulated from the start?”

“Of course. I always expect it. But I hoped that if he was hiding anything it would be that Will could prove to be a pretender. If he had been trying to hide that well, all the trouble would have been worth it, like striking gold. But whatever Will is, it’s not quite that.”

“So not a Pretender?” Jack asks hopefully.

Davis laughs “oh so hopeful that I’ll leave your kid alone. You’ve grown attached; it doesn’t suit you, makes you weak.”

“I’m only human, you knew that when you fast-tracked me. I’m not a psychopath, I can’t be everything you want me to be.” Jack replies.

Davis smiles at Jack warmly “I think you underestimate yourself son.”

Jack frowns at him but doesn’t rise to the insult.

“What about the other red files? Not all of them were destroyed, couldn’t one of them find your guy?”

Davis snorted “They were trying to wipe every trace of the red files from the face of the earth. If they couldn’t have them then no one could. The couple we’ve got are helpful. But the best ones were all put down.”

“Except for our informant.” Jack says.

Davis nods.

“You insisted on changing the plan. You’re the reason they died.” Jack says.

Davis snorts “I was hoping to…”

Jack butts in “double cross him, I know. But if he can do half of what you think he can then he’d never have fallen for that.”

“It was a last-minute decision; I was younger then. Impatient and arrogant. I’m not going to make the same mistake twice.”

“You’re even more obsessed with the man than you were all those years ago.” Jack comments “You’d think you would have taken a moment to think about what you’ve spent and lost to trying to find him. Your family doesn’t even know you…”

“You think *they’re* my family? Silly boy.” Davis smiles at Jack, but there is no joy in it. “You’re the only family I have left. I can see you don’t understand. You wouldn’t because your ignorant of your own family. Ignorant of your mother’s history. But I know everything I need to; the rest is for you to find out on your own.”

Jack doesn’t answer, doesn’t speak. He doesn’t know what the hell Davis means by that. About his mother? He thinks back to the last time he saw her. A flash in his head of her smiling at him and the warmth that spread through his chest when she did. It seemed so insignificant now. They’d been moving so that Jack could go to a school for the gifted and he’d been mad at them for that. His mama and da had been lawyers back in a time when it wasn’t easy for people like them sleeves to be much more than they were born to, and neither of them had been born to much at all.

They had been loving and kind, they’d valued hard work and honesty. Good people. His people. He was proud of them and couldn’t understand how they could have had any

connection with Davis.

Davis though, didn't give him long to ponder it and was already moving the conversation along.

"You're not a fool Jack. Whatever else the informant did, he *made* Will. Do you *understand that*. He's crossed some sort of bridge. He's done the impossible. Will is the greatest scientific discovery of the decade, maybe the century and you managed to keep it from me." Davis looked at Jack angrily "you thought you could keep him from me. I've had good men cleaned for a lot less than that. Your just lucky I consider you mine."

Jack grimaced and turned away. "I'm not going to apologize for keeping my nephew safe."

Davis snorted "Is that what you were doing? How was he after you showed him the photos of those dead girls I wonder?"

"Braver than a grown man." Jack answers "I couldn't have been prouder". Angry on the inside, still on the out.

Davis turns his body away from the window overlooking Will. He searches Jacks face "So tell me Jack. What have you been keeping from me, don't keep out anything, not a single *insignificant* detail. Because as I said *Ed Graham will be fine*, because I know how much you value your *brother*. *Now* tell your uncle Davis everything."

Jack is so still, like he's made of concreate, but his heart is pounding and his hands are sweeting. "More threats?" he asks calmly.

Davis chuckles "of course. You know me so well Jack. Cleaning Edward Graham from the face of the earth would be easy, even satisfying."

Jack swallows "you know that…."

"Of course, I do. But you'd be robbing little Will from…"

"ENOUGH!" Jacks voice is louder than he'd expected it to be. It echoes off the concreate walls that surround them. "Enough." He repeats. "I'll tell you everything you want to know and more. But enough of the games. You mean nothing to me Davis, I was young and foolish when I trusted you and *I won't* make that mistake again."

Davis turned back to look at Will "Good. You're learning."

Hannibal stood beside the real-estate agent in the kitchen of a large Baltimore house.

"Yes," he said "I think this will do just fine."

Chapter Sixteen: Sathurl

Chapter Summary

Will's having a strange time in Sathurl.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Sixteen

Sathurl

New Orleans

1970

Edward peered around the corner to make sure it was clear treading.

“Come on.” He whispered to his new friend and as quietly as they could they made it half way down the hall to what looked like a supply cupboard. Edward waggled his eye brows at Jack and pulled out a key “I’m a man of many talents.” He explained with a small grin.

He unlocked the door and herded Jack inside before closing and locking it behind him.

It turned out not to be a supply cupboard at all, but instead a hall with dusty shelves on either side leading to a room.

Ed switched on the light and fell into a pile of old pillows he’d stolen from the linin cupboard.

Jack sat on a pile of his own and looked about. There was an old book shelf with a splattering of books. A bowl with some sweets on top of it and a blanket.

“This is my place; but I’m willing to shear with the right person.” He looked at Jack squarely “You the right person big boy?” he asked

Jack nodded.

“Thought so. This’ll be *our* place then from now on. Only we know about it. The grown-ups that run the place never used it before I found the key. Now that it’s locked and they can’t get in its near on a sure thing. Even if they tried it mind you and found it locked, they’d be too lazy this lot to go on a key hunt or get a lock-smith in.”

Edward leaned back proudly. “And when I’m not here it’ll be all yours. A hide away when you need it. Just make sure you in your bunk at lights out. Or they’ll get the police in. During the day and night, you can be where ever and no one will notice most of the time, invisible we is.”

Ed picked up the bowl of sweets and held it out for Jack to take some.

“I was thinking of going on a food raid in the kitchens if you wanted to help?” Ed asked and peered at Jack who had wrapped his arms around his legs but looked comfy enough chewing on some sweets. The boy nodded at him and Ed was pleased with his new friend.

“We’ll get the good stuff, saw a bunch of new stuff come in this afternoon. Normally all the good stuff gets hogged by the staff, spinless blobs. So, I like to go in as soon as to get something for me self as well.”

Edward found his ball and began bouncing it off the wall by his feet and catching it.

“You like your food big boy?” he asks

Jack nods.

“You okay with me calling you big boy? Just until you can tell me with your own mouth your real name.”

Jack nods and offers the smallest smile.

Ed pauses in his bouncing and looks at him carefully. “You scared as hell now big boy. I know it, they know it, but you can’t show it. What I find helps is knowing that everyone here is just as shit scared as you. We might not look it but every one of us is a sob story ourselves. So, take it from me, one sob story to another, we scared as hell but tough as a hunk of gristle that you tear your teeth on.”

Jack nods “okay.” he says quietly.

Ed smiles brightly at Jack who smiles back “That’s it big boy. Smile at the other boys when they’re being the biggest arse-holes this side of the equator. That pisses them off something chronic and at the same time shows them no fear. I can make a boy wild mad with the right smile at the right time. A little wave sprinkled in there can get them to show their bad intents in front of the grown-ups and gets them into a world of trouble.” He nods happily “some of my best memories are making some of those old boys lose their shit.”

Sathurl

Age of Lugh

When Will had regained a sense of up and down again he managed to stager to his feet only for his face to be grabbed again by the king.

“You cannot keep secrets from the darkest parts of your own mind Aodh, that is where I live.” The king said and Will decided right there the king was an arrogant prick. Still, the creature-man-thing let go of Will a moment later and took in the scene again.

They looked up through the floating lights that had appeared around them.

They were beautiful, fluttering lights that were floating down to the ground all around them lighting up the city as it had never been.

It was almost like standing in the light of day and Will thought the place looked better like this. Less ominous, more fantastical. He could see the colors of the buildings better; the houses were brighter in color than he’d thought. Or not, he supposed If it were never this bright here then neither were the colors. He shook the thought out of his head. Now was not the time for getting stuck on something.

All around the locals had stopped still in wonder. Will found their reaction to it all the most interesting part. He filed away the fact that even monsters were capable of wonder, hoping he would remember that when he woke up. It seemed important to remember somehow, strangely relevant.

Will caught one of the lights that floated by in his hand and found that it was a leaf. The leaves in the trees were not filled with light so it was a curious thing. “What did you do to make them light up like this?” He asked the king.

The king looked at him again, there was a slight quirk of the mans eye brow “You imagine I did this?”

“Who else?” Will asked.

"You are in a rush to put the blame on me. Perhaps because you fear the possibility of your own power.” The king said.

“You should know I’m twelve.” Will snips “I can assure you that it comes with very little power, and definitely none for making glowing leaves.” A small frown flitters across his face “And even if I did, you’d think I’d have noticed by now.”

The kings’ eyes stare at him blankly and Will can almost feel himself getting absorbed into them. He looks down and away. He can see nothing even when he tries, but he feels seen. He doesn’t like that feeling. “Come, walk with me please.” The king asks then.

Will glances around at the king’s guard whom are back to normal and ready to move at a moment’s notice.

Will swallows and nods “Sure” he says.

They are a strange procession, the king and Will in the middle, surrounded by king’s guard. They travel down the main central road towards the castle leaving behind them a gleaming

area of city lite up by leaves behind them. The other monsters make way for them but Will can sense them watching them. Watching him.

“This world was created for the sefir by Brandubh’s dearly departed kin.” The king said as they walked.

“That was nice of them.” Will said, looking around with new interest, at the towering trees that down in the roots were physically enmeshed with the stone buildings.

“It was not a decision made out of kindness. Sathurl might be in many ways a slice of paradise plucked from the minds of creatures of great power. But it is also something more cruel in nature.”

The king paused and took a breath that Will suspected he didn’t need to before he continued “It was built with one soul purpose. That purpose is to keep my people imprisoned. Sathurl is a prison, a beautiful one but a prison all the same.”

Will looked around at it again. “It’s a very big prison then.”

“It used to be.” The king continued “When it was built millennia ago. But now it grows too full to sustain its population. My people are starving.”

Will looked more closely at the creatures, it was hard to tell if they were starving per say. They were so different in form from anything back home. “The last king had no problems putting on feasts.” He comments instead.

“He was a terrible steward. Stealing from his own people to full an endless appetite. I shared him out amongst as many as I could. Fortunately, he was large even amongst his own kind, so I was able to make him stretch.” The king said.

Will paused for a moment, a frown on his face. “Is it strange that I think that almost sounds like a reasonable thing to do. It’s sorta *poetic*.”

“Not at all, a creative mind can find poetry where duller minds falter.” The king said. Then added “It was his best chance at recompense. I am pleased that I could help him achieve it.”

The king stopped then and looked back the way they had come. “It is happening as I thought. Turn around Aodh and see what you have created.”

Will turned back and found his mouth agape in surprise. Where the leaves had fallen thickest new plants had begun sprouting up. Flowers where in full bloom around their roots, there petals glowing in replacement to the leaves, which were dimming now.

Then from by a trunk something pulled it self up and out of the leaves. A doe, with a twitching nose stood for a moment and in the silent shock of those watching dashed away. Then something else crawled out the end of one of the new tree’s brunches. A rabbit? And it was also gone as if sensing the predators surrounding it.

“The power of Brandubh’s kin is alive and well in you.”

Will shook his head in denial “I didn’t. I couldn’t. Nope… there’s no way. I’m going to wake up soon anyway and forget all about this.”

“Son of three of three. Do you want to know what that means?”

Will is still watching and more and more trees begin to sprout up, dwarfed by there larger ancient brothers and sisters. But still amazing, and vibrant and some how filled with life. Birds were now bursting out of freshly grown fruit and taking to the sky.

“What?” Will asks only partly paying attention as a new, smaller world blossoms into being in the shade of the bigger.

A hand gripped Wills arm gently and swiveled him back towards the king. “Son of three of three. Aodh do you know what that means?”

Will shook his head “you know I don't, will you tell me?”

“I will. But first you must tell me your human name.”

Will bit his lip a bit and considered “This is a prison, so that means you can’t leave?”

“Only those with human blood can traverse the worlds.” The king answers.

“So, quid pro quo then?” Will asks “I tell you my human name and you explain all this to me?”

“That’s not how quid pro quo works. I will answer *one* question for every one question you answer.” The king says with a small smile on his lips.

Will felt this was a dangerous game but could not think of a good reason why that would be. None of these creatures could leave Sathurl so what did he have to lose. “Okay.” He said “Deal.”

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal's hard to write in a way that sounds like him. I hope I did it. soooooooo hard.

Sorry it's short. I'm struggling to stay focused.

Chapter Seventeen: A Deal with the… Creature, Man, Thing

Chapter Summary

Will wakes up.

Chapter Notes

This was very hard to write. I hope you all like it. I hope it makes sense?

This one is for Vexing, enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Seventeen

A Deal with the… Creature, Man, Thing

New Orleans

1971

"Jack run!" Edward shouted and twisted in the older boy's arms to see his friend.

"No." Jack said and Edward cringed inside, Jack was stubborn and brave. But that wasn't the best combination for a place such as this.

Jack was moving closer instead, chin held high. He rolled his shoulders and jutted his jaw and prepared himself for a fight. He was almost as tall as the older boys but there were three of them and just the two of them and Edward was small for his age.

“Awwww you Edwards’s hero?” One of the big boys taunted.

“Yeah, Jacko why you friends with this runt? We’d take you in and then you’d rule this place.”

Jack now stood before the boy holding Edward. He was tall and burly and had the starting’s of acne on his face. Gorge Merrick was a bully with a better than average brain that had put it to use on ruling his kingdom of the unwanted and rejected offspring of New Orleans.

Edward hated him. He didn’t do what Gorge told him and so the other boy was forced to beat him down until he complied. But Edward wasn’t that sort of boy, and it turned out Jack was a loyal friend and so he got pulled into all of Edwards miss-adventures.

So now the two friends were rogues, in a world of rejects and lived a life of hiding in plain sight.

“Edwards my friend.” Jack said “That means more to me that what ever the fuck ruling this crap-heap ever would. Now listen carefully boys, you’re going to let my friend go.”

One of the boys let out a huff, the other one laughed out right, not George though. George just watched Jack curiously. He gave Edward a shake “how’d you worm this one away before I got eh? Sneaky little bugger you are.”

“I got up early.” Edward supplied flatly.

George smacked Edward hard across the face, making his head snap to the side a split on his lip appeared.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake you fucking pig, put him down. I heard something good and if you want to take a part in it, and I know you will then you’ll put Ed down and let him go.” Jack

said.

The other boys went to move at Jack but George held up his hand and they stopped in their tracks.

“Better hope I am Jacko. Became if I ain’t I’m going to break little Edwards’s arm clean in two you hear me. I’m tired of this little runts rebellious ways, are we clear? He refuses to bow and it’s worse that he’s so small. The other’s see and it gives me a look of a weak-minded fool.”

“No one would call you weak minded.” Jack says “just mean.”

“I would hope so Jacko.”

“That wasn’t a compliment.” Jack adds.

George smiles at him “I hear it how I will. Now tell me what you is hearing and I’ll hand out my fair judgement.”

“Let Edward go and I’ll tell you.” Jack said.

George losses his smile “you think you’re so smart Jacko, and for some good reason, I’ll give you that. You not like any of the other littluns, not that you little at all. But if you treat me like a fool again, you’ll find yourself in the world of pain you get me?”

“I know you ain’t no fool, I just know you’ll want what I know. Me and Ed walk home the long way after school, to avoid trouble from you and your boys, and on our travels, we came across a deal being struck between some people you might know.”

“hmmm.” George said and squeezed Edwards’s arm hard, pulling it back harshly. Edward cried out, but Jack remained still. “What’s to stop me from breaking the runts arm and then

beating it out of you I wonder?" George added with a smile.

"You can beat us all you like. We aren't the type to tell you anything. They will hear what you did. Beating us and they'll know we didn't break. That you couldn't get what you want from us. Then what'll they say about you? Couldn't break a seven-year-old? Couldn't break that little runt?" he said and pointed at Edward who had squeezed his eyes shut to stop from crying.

"Your boys already crying." George pointed out happily "you so sure he could take it?"

Jack snorted "I seen him take worse than what you've got to give. So put him down and I'll tell you and we can leave all this ugliness behind us."

"I tell you what Jacko, I will. But you should know that if you cross me there ain't no knowledge you could hold over me to stop me from braking both of little Edwards legs, you hear me?"

Jack nods.

George let go of Edward who took off to Jack "what the feck are you doing?" he whispered to Jack angrily "you fucken idiot!"

Jack sent Ed a look and he shut up the other boy in a flash. Edward knew that look. Jack had a plan that didn't involve getting them in the middle of a teenage war of idiotic proportions, or at least Edward hoped that was the case.

"Alright then." George said "you got your runt little side kick back. What deal did you hear being done?"

But just then a boy came running around the corner puffing and red in the face "There you is Edward. The adults looking for you, I been sent here there and all about looking for you so you'd better come now" he said.

“The adults will have to wait.” George said “I’ve got business with little Edward.”

“I don’t think that’ll happen.” The boy said with a shake of the head “not even for you George, the police are here, with some serious looks on their faces.”

“Well shit.” George said and within the second George and his boys went about making themselves as scarce as a cat in the dog pound.

The boys headed to the office, where Edward left Jack and went in. Jack waited for his friend nervously. They didn’t normally get called there unless something was wrong, and the police only come for something life changing.

Turned out Edwards’s father was dead. Murdered in prison. Not that Edward cared as much as he knew he should, he barely knew the man. He only had vague memories from his younger years visiting the man in prison.

But his mom came in as well, crying all over the place and Edward hugged her out of obligation. “it’ll be okay Ma,” he said to her in a whisper “you’ll be okay, you’ll see.” He didn’t know why she was all sobs and wails; she’d not seen her husband herself in years and from what Edward could glean his father had been a horrible husband with a viciousness to him that his mom hadn’t deserved.

Once she had managed to calm down it was even sorta nice to see her. He hadn’t in a while. But then she ruined it by talking about getting better for him again. She’d done it before and it never ended well but Edward pretended to be happy by the prospect and smiled up at her “That’ll be great mom,” he reached out and placed his hand on hers “I love you mom.”

She’d smiled her slightly dazed drug bedraggled smile “I love you too little bee. I’ll really do it this time, you’ll see, and then we’ll be a real family.”

But now that he had a friend, he *really* didn’t want her messing it up by taking him home again. He did love her; he just didn’t want to live with her again. He had Jack now, he wasn’t

alone anymore and… he couldn't *do* it all again.

Sathurl

Age of Lugh

Will was seated at in a cushioned chair inside the kings' personal apartments, overlooking a large window that was tall enough to traverse several levels of the building, all of which were inside the kings' apartments. With a wave of the kings hand the kings guard and stopped outside the double doors leading into the king's sanctuary, something for which Will had been thankful until he had realized, he was alone with the scariest monster in all of Sathurl.

The castle itself was extreme in scale, A massive black tree grew through the center of the castle, its brunches spread out into the sky holding turrets and towers that peered over the top of the tallest trees in Sathurl. Above the forest was more city, this one with an entirely different group of monsters.

Will remembered it all now, flying monsters mostly. Big black winged creatures fighting over the best brunches to build their giant nest houses which looked like twisted brunch hills with holes to fly into. Feathered red horses with sharp teeth and tails and manes of flame were diving into the upper most brunches and bringing back smaller monsters from the canopy, grasped tightly in their maws.

Will had seen this on many of his trips but only remembered it anew sitting back in the comfy chair in the shadow of the forest. It was a strange feeling, like the memories of another life sifting their way back into his brain. He wondered how his waking-self had ever forgotten such vivid living image's. They were back now either way, stirring feelings of fear and wonder.

The very real remembering's of fleeing across Sathurl entered his mind but were pushed back out quickly, he had no space for those now. Terror filled nights of running from gnashing teeth were not the thing to focus on when confronted by the king, and he did not know how long till he would wake up again safe, in his own bed.

The room was large and extravagant. Book lined shelves surrounded them in a massive circle of carved wood. Seemingly inspired by the shape of the central monster sized tree, many of the rooms had been constructed in a circular manner.

How exactly that had been managed Will had no idea, it hardly seemed like a convenient way to build a building. The castle was built in a situation very precarious in nature if you asked Will, for it jutted out over the edge of the Sathurl itself. Sathurl was flat and vast but this castle stood on its very edge, wedging itself off into space, with nothing but crumbling pieces of dirt and rock between it and nothing.

The prized view was even more spectacular (and scary) for the fact that Will could see the earth, A blue glowing ball of life before him. Millions of voices were reaching up through the void of space to form a strange echoing that shouldn't exist.

"How can we hear them?" Will asks.

The king who is sitting watching him closely leans forward "It is a taunt," the creature says "Your kin have not been kind to ours. They wish for us to remember what we have lost. So, the voices of Tarn raise up to us here, so we can be reminded of our folly's, and hunger because of it."

"Your turn then." Will says in reply, taking in the answer and pushing forward, wanting to ask what he could before he awoke again.

"What have you been thinking about so intently these last minutes?" The king asks.

"Architecture." Will replies.

The king raises his eye brows minutely but says nothing more on it.

“Is Tarn earth?” Will asks.

The king inclines his head “It is and more. The people are Tarn, the plants, the animals, the magical and mundane all the same. Brought to life by some of the same forces that created Sathurl. This castle itself is an ancient being brought to life by those who spoke life into Tarn. My people themselves, though banished, are Tarn.”

“But Sathurl isn’t?” Will asked.

“My turn little princeling, but I will let you have that one if you answer two of my questions next.”

Will inclines his head.

“Sathurl wasn’t born in those most ancient days of creation. Sathurl came after, in the arrogance of your kin, who believed themselves superior in thought on the measure of morals and made themselves the Judges of Tarn. They took for themselves the right to judge the rights of all.”

Will takes that in as best as he can, but is not given a full amount of time to process when the king asks his next question.

“What is your name Aodh? Your full *human* name.” The king asks, his eyes moving along the lines of Wills face with intense focus. He leans forwards “Who are you dear *prince*?”

Will knew this was coming but the question still sent warning singles thought his skin. It clawed at his head and brain, then he could see them all around, girls hanging. Hanging from every shelf in the room, from the stirs and the spiraling brunch like rafters that looked to have

spun themselves up into the roof. Dead girls, strung up naked and bleed out, with the pale grey hues of death on their skin. With wide open blood shot eyes, hazy and unblinking. But they weren't dead, how could they be when they were screaming.

Will stood and spun around, but they were there, where ever he looked. They were everywhere.

The king was speaking but Will could not understand what he was saying. Then the clanging noise of terror and pain vanishes as quickly as it had started. "There, they are gone, this is my domain, the monsters of your mind can not hurt you here." The king says.

Will opens his eyes tentatively and uncovers his ears. Eyes and ears he had not been aware were closed and covered. the king is standing over him and Will shuffled back up from the ground where he had found himself and back into his chair.

He tried not to show his fear but there was something in the shadows which had grown larger in the room. Something darker than the absence of light. Something terrible. The king's presence is all about the room, seeping into the patches of light. Carving itself a space to dwell forever.

"There now, all better?" The king asks and sits back down, quietly, calmly. Ignoring the darkness reaching for and from him "Your name Aodh?"

Will nods, he had agreed to tell him. He felt that to break an agreement in a place like Sathurl would be dangerous. Unwise at the least, deadly at the worst.

"My name is Will," he said and swallowed "Will Graham." He looked at his hands as they rubbed at the chair arms rhythmically, an attempt to distract from the voices clawing again at the inside of his brain. Warning him. Begging him. 'stop' they said over and over 'STOP, STOP, STOP.'

Suddenly a whirl of birds appeared, not Sathurlian birds. Birds from home. Earth birds, fragile in comparison to anything here, but they were hundreds and angry. They swoop into the room from nowhere in a whirl wind and screams. They fly at the king, pecking at what ever they could get to.

Not just birds, fox's and rabbits and creatures of all kinds, they go for the king like one creature. Ruthless and Will finds himself, with his back pressed against a book shelf in terror.

Then there was a weight on his shoulder and a voice in his ear "Make hast princeling, Lugh will not be stopped. If you want to wake up come now."

Will turned to see Zane, his fairy-god-squirrel. "Now." It said "come with me Aodh."

Then the squirrel was off, running and Will, numb and overwhelmed ran after him. Around him the animals were dying, there necks snapping in mid-air. There body's twisting and distorting.

Will ran after Zane like he was running through mud, like each foot step was a mile. He crossed no threshold that he could see nor opened any door. But his feet became heavier and heavier and the world flipped on its side and he woke up.

A steady beeping sound greeted his ears.

Beep… Beep… Beep… Beep… Beep… Beep…

He opened his eyes to harsh light and grey concrete walls. He was laying in a bed and all around him were machines. Then moments latter the room was swarming with people.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.

Does Hannibal read as himself? I am trying but he is hard to write.

Also, does anyone know how to add an image to a chapter? I did some art for this fic...

Chapter Eighteen: If a Tree Falls in a Forest

Chapter Summary

Will's mostly asleep again, because Davis. Hannibal is a weirdo. Ed is somewhere off screen. Jack is in a tough place. Davis like a cat that's got a mouse dangling from his claws.

Chapter Notes

Ok. So here's the thing. There is some mention of Pretenders in this story. You don't have to have seen it to read this but I will do a quick little explanation for those who haven't.
These are copied from places online because they say it better than me.
Here is a list of the red-files if anyone is interested: pretenderheadquarters.com/centre-access/annex/redfiles/

Taken from somewhere I can not now find a ling to :
"As defined in the pilot, Pretenders are "Geniuses' with the ability to insinuate themselves into any walk of life, to literally become anyone." For Jarod, this talent apparently has two related but distinct aspects: One, he is able to convincingly reproduce or "simulate" any experience, and correctly analyze the results, as well as feel the emotions involved. Two, with a little preparation, Jarod is able to take on any profession (doctor, lawyer, policeman, etc.). As Sydney has said, he doesn't impersonate-he actually becomes whatever he has chosen to be."

My best attempt at an explanation:
He has an IQ that is off the charts and can do anything from the work of a Nobel prize scientist, or mathematician to a racecar driver or fireman. He can create and invent technology, weapons, that no one has ever thought of before. He can accurately simulate in his brain how things will play out, like a computer but with the ability to become other humans, to feel what they would feel and think in a situation. With his intimate understanding of the human element some could argue he is more accurate than a computer algorithm in things that need to account for people.
As well as that, if you want to know the cause of a plane crash and can't find the black box? Jarod could help in two ways. Firstly he could give you an idea of where to find the black box, maybe even pinpoint a location for you. Secondly he could sim the pilots. Become one of them and tell you what happened.

Jarod is not in this first part of this series, but he is mentioned so I thought I would put that out there.

The red-files are potential pretenders, empaths and other weird things.
Jarod is a red-file.
There are different generations of red-files, Jarod was in the project prodigy generation.
In this fanfiction Will is a red-file also.

I hope none of it puts anyone off, Will will eventually discover all this on his own. So you don't need to know it to enjoy this. But I have seen the show, I know all the things. I decided it might be confusing to not know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Eighteen

If a Tree Falls in a Forest

New Orleans

1972

“Mom, if you want me to stay, I’ll stay. But only if Jack can too.” Ed said to his mom.

His mom looked Jack up and down “I see,” she said and tilted her head to the side “and how old is Jack?”

“I’m eight ma’am.” Jack said nervously “and I’m a good kid, I won’t be any trouble.”

Ed and Jack had spent their night galivanting around New Orleans. Jack had, had to get out with out being noticed and meet Ed out side the gates of the boy’s home.

Ed had, had to be at the right place waiting for him to led him back to his and moms flat. It was small and stunk of his mom’s smokes but it was a place they could be a family.

Jack had found It had been supper exciting till they arrived, and then the fear came. Fear of this lady he didn’t know not wanting him around.

Ed’s mom looked between the two of them “you two don’t look much like brothers.” She said “We’ll have to say you have different fathers to fool the neighbours. Or they’ll have the police around here.”

“We *do* have different fathers.” Ed said with a grin taking his moms words as an agreement.

Ed's mom snorted out a laugh “My little Edward, always the smarty pants.”

Ed smiled at his mom brightly then turned to his friend “com’on I’ll teach you how to fish and we can bring back something for dinner.”

Jack settled into life with the Murray’s. He found it easy to enjoy the comfort of a mom worrying over him. She made them breakfast and read them bedtime stories and treated him no different than Ed. Jack liked to pretend she really was his mom and Ed his big brother. A family.

Sometimes at night Jack cried. Remembering his own mom and dad, Ed being Ed, picked up on it. Jacks’ quiet days led to tears at night. Ed would rub his back and say “there, there, big boy. It doesn’t mean you don’t love em anymore. That you don’t miss em. You shouldn’t feel bad just cos you happy again.”

Washington, D.C.

1972

To say that Davis was mad was an understatement. He was furious. Some useless fuckwits down in New Orleans had actually lost Jack. He’d made a call already when Jack had first been placed in the boy’s home. He’d wanted updates, but not a single call to inform him that Jack was missing. Incompetence was unforgivable, the worst of all sins as far as he was concerned.

The police had found nothing, no sign of him. Had checked the usual places they would, filled out some forms and called it a day. The boy was an orphan, no family, in the end he was the sort of boy who could disappear without causing waves.

Was a child missing if there was no one to notice him gone? The tree in the forest without an audience would say yes. The rest of the world shouted out a resounding no. A tree felled in the forest; a boy disappeared. A married couple, both lawyers, killed in a car crash. No one came to the funeral, except for him. He was a witness to the things unseen. He was the ghost in the forest telling the wind where to blow. He was the real power in the world today but he had no witnesses yet, couldn’t have any yet.

The most frustrating part of the whole thing was Davis didn’t have the *power* he needed to look into what had happened to Jack properly without someone else possibly hearing about it. He couldn’t risk it. He couldn’t risk everything he had planned by showing his cards now. For now, little Jack Crawford was on his own.

He hoped the boy could handle himself.

At the very least *he'd learn* how to handle himself, or not, either way it was for the best. If Jack failed, he'd be another faceless statistic for the masses to morally tear themselves up over. No, even with his vested interest who was he to argue against nature. *Survival of the fittest*.

When one had no family, they were in a game of survival, and survival not love would be the judge of their worth.

At the end of the day who was Davis to *not* bow to evolution. Not even he was that arrogant. If the boy was fit to survive, he would.

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He hated how much he wished the boy *would* survive, and not just live but thrive.

He hated how he thought about him every other week. He would look at his children and compare them to the orphan boy in New Orleans. A boy that might now might even be dead…

But if he survived, maybe even thrived, well then when he grew up Jack would find himself under the protection of a very talented man. He'd see to it that Jack Crawford would not be a wallflower. He'd rise him up and take him under his wing. He would be his protégé, the one to inherit the keys to the kingdom he'd build for him…. For *her*.

Sathurl

Age of Lugh

Hannibal stood still, his head to the side. Aodh was gone. He'd somehow woken up on his own accord. It should not have been possible; it was Hannibal's magic that had called him here. Hannibal's magic that had been keeping him here. Hannibal's magic, and within Hannibal's domain too. It was unexpected. Surprising, and nothing surprised Hannibal any more.

Somehow the boy had called a Tharn to him. Across what should have been an impossible border to its kind. The boy had called it and used it to leave. How the boy had learned such magic Hannibal did not know.

He walked over to the chair the boy had sat on, he leaned forward and breathed in deeply. His sent still lingered, and… a hair. With a small smile on his lips, he picked it up and brought it before his eyes.

He should keep it. He shouldn't waste such a treasure, but he supposed he would just have to create ample opportunity to get more. He inwardly shrugged and sucked the hair back; he closed his eyes to savor the taste and let it sit there within his mouth. It melted there, his saliva rushing to meet it and…

And…

Power, with the pleasure of a three-star Michelin Restaurant.

A single hair that was all it had taken to wake him up all anew, a flavor so unique and tantalizing. Power, which had long laid dormant with in himself flooded his veins. He was restored. It was true then, this *boy*, was truly Aodh.

He had hopped, and had it confirmed when the child had called life once again into Sathurl. But it is one thing to see it and another to taste it in your very being.

He smiled and sat back down at his usual chair and looked across at the now empty one. Will Graham was the last of his kind, and with his *removal* nothing would stand in the way of his people returning to Tarn and taking back that which was rightfully theirs.

He had only just arrived back in Sathurl, but he had never intended to stay. He'd known one way or another he would have to deal with the interloper. But it looked like things were going to be a lot more interesting than he'd imagined. He closed his eyes and leaned back. Will Graham was going to bring a lot *life* into his life, he could tell.

Undisclosed Location

May 1997

It took some moments to realize he was back on earth, but everything was wrong. He wasn't at home. There were lights and people and noise. Why was he here? Where was his da? He looked and looked but he couldn't see him.

He was gasping for breath and surrounded by people in lab coats. They kept talking and not listening.

He went to rub his eyes and couldn't. His hands were tied down.

"Hello?" he heard his voice say, he sounded pathetic to his own ears. "Da?"

No one was listening. They were reading machines and looking at him. Someone shined a blazing light in his eyes and he cried out. "What's happening?" he asked, "where am I?... where's my da?"

But they weren't listening to him. He wasn't even there. He was nothing. They were talking about him but not too him.

"DA?" he tried again "DA!" he started yanking with his arms and then some one was telling him to lie still but he couldn't. It was important that he see his da. He needed to see him. He couldn't get enough air in. People where touching him, he didn't want them to.

"Stop it!" he cried out "don't touch me!"

No one replied and then he felt heavy. Tired. And the world around him began to spin, the people's voices growing further and further away into blankness.

Jack came rushing into the observation room and found Davis there speaking to some doctors.

“He woke up?” he says urgently, but when he looks over at Will he seemed to still be asleep.

“Excuse me.” Davis says and the doctors leave with quick nods.

Davis sits down and motions for Jack to join him. Jack does, only because where they are seated, he can still see Will.

“He’s sedated for now.” Davis says “But yes he woke up.”

“But he’s, okay?” Jack asks looking over Wills form.

Davis inclines his head “perfectly.”

“Then why is he sedated?” Jack asks with a small shake of his head “If the kids fine why put him right back under?”

“He was panicking and we had some more tests to run, it was easier to do the more invasive ones while he was asleep… and…”

Jack waited.

“Something came back with him,” Davis said “Something not of this world.”

Jack shook his head trying to understand.

Davis pulled out a file, “this has photos of the specimen that was recovered hiding under Wills bed.”

Jack takes it in hand and frowning opens it. He shakes his head as he looks at the photos “I don’t understand” he says.

“Neither do we.” Davis replies.

“But… it’s just a squirrel that some jackass has dyed?” Jack’s voice is raised, irritated. He glares down at Davis, who like most people is shorter in stature than he is.

Davis smiles at him, amused “that’s the natural state of its fur Jack. Talking to animals is one thing but this? it is a real living breathing animal. Proof that whatever that man did to create Will? Is perhaps the miracle he said it was. See the flowers on its head? Those aren’t separate from the organism; they are *part* of it.”

Jack rubs his hand over his face sensing the danger on the horizon “they can’t be.”

“That’s not all, the thing can speak.” Davis adds “Though it doesn’t appear to be making any sense as of yet, some sort of gibberish. We have our people working on it, but if Will can talk to it, we probably don’t need to go through the trouble.”

Jack hands back the file and looked back at Will “I thought you wanted to keep Will’s existence a secret.”

“I do, I can cover this up for another week at the most, then he’ll have to be discreetly released into your care.”

Jack released a deep breath he hadn’t realised he’d been holding and leans forward resting his head in his hands. “Thank God,” he said “Thank you, he’s still just a kid. His life’s been turned upside down enough and with everything with Ed… thank you.”

“Jack, I hope you understand that when I say your care, I mean *your* care. Ed Graham has proven himself to be a nuisance, and I’ve decided the sooner we distance him from Will the better.”

Jack sat back up slowly in disbelief, “*you can’t do that*.” He said “you’re talking about removing Will from Ed’s life?” He stood up suddenly, shock coursing through his veins “*No*.”

Davis doesn’t move from where he is seated “Edward Graham is a lose cannon. He rang nine-one-one and that’s not even his first transgression. The man keeps calling attention to Will and his current state is only going to make things worse. At this stage I have decided that Ed will be taking a step back in his role in Will’s life. You can take him, or find someone else that I will sign off on, or I will find a place for him. Somewhere controlled, with someone controllable.”

“No.” Jack said again while looking down on Wills sleeping form “That’s *not* going to happen.”

Davis sighs “Yes, it is. This can go two ways Jack. You can help and Ed can still visit Will under your supervision. That is probably the best option you have for the little family you’ve made for yourself.”

He smiled sideways at Jack “And what a rag-tag group you’ve found, but the truth is I should have taken Will years ago and placed him somewhere else but I have a weak spot for you and I thought you could handle it. You *haven’t* handled it, Jack, that’s on you. But I’m not unreasonable. So, I’m offering you a deal. You take Will. Ed still gets contact. You all just make it work.”

“Ed will *never* agree to this.” Jack says eyes wide with horror, he looks down at Davis “You’re a psychopath.”

Davis doesn’t deny it “Thought you would have worked that out a long time ago Jack, I fit the criteria. Factor one, I can pride myself on that at least.”

Jack looks down on him in disgust, completely ignoring Davis' comment. "Ed will never go for it… *you know that!* He'll make himself herd, he wont just take this lying down he'll *know* this was you. You don't know him like I do, Eds not what he seems Davis, you think he's not smart enough to get you where it hurts but Ed Graham is a survivor and he won't take kindly to you *meddling in his boy's life*."

Jack should have seen this coming, truly, he hadn't, but he should have. But when it came to Ed what was he supposed to do? The man was just uncontrollable. He had always known there was a risk, and Davis wasn't one for risks, he'd just be lucky so far.

He'd *known* Ed would one day go too far, and that when he did, there would be nothing he could do to stop it. Sometimes Edward just made himself unprotectable. And he knew he wouldn't be able to beg Davis back from the edge. *He knew.* But he still felt *blindsided*. When had Ed rang nine-one-one? Had he not heard him telling him not to… This was *all wrong*. So wrong. sickening. A *fucken nightmare.*

"Then you'll just have to convince him it's because of you." Davis says as if from far away.

"How will that help?" Jack says scathingly, too far in his own head.

"If he thinks it's me, you're probably right, he'd come after me. I'd have to have him cleaned. You know that, I know that. Then where would that leave us? You'd do something stupid and I'd probably have to clean you too and that I'd prefer not to have to do." Davis smirks at Jack's raised eye brows "But if it comes from you, if he blames you, well, he loves you, Jack. He sees you as family, other than Will you're *all* he's got, all he's ever had."

Suddenly there is lights and action in the room below and Jack watches as Will starts to struggle with the restraints but a nurse deftly injects his IV with more sedative and Will calms again, next to him a doctor is writing notes. The doctor looks up to where Davis is sitting, walks over to the wall and pushes an intercom button "Sir, we are at double the original dose."

"Very good." Davis replies with a nod "hopefully this will provide us with more satisfactory results, keep me posted."

Jack is watching his nephew who had flailed a little against the restraints but had now gone back to sleep properly. Jack wants to grab onto Davis' tie and drag him over to the window, he wants to shove his face against the glass and scream some compassion into him. But he can't, it wouldn't change a thing. It wouldn't help Ed, or Will.

Davis continues talking as if nothing had happened, as if the child in the room below was not someone but something. "He'll be angry with you and justifiably so, but he's far less likely to create a mess that'll need a good-hard-clean to fix. If he's as smart as you say then he already knows it's going to happen eventually; especially with how things are going with the cancer."

Jack shrinks back down and sits "He's been preparing Bella and I, but Will still doesn't know. Ed wants to drag out every last inch of normal in Will's life while he's still here to do it."

Davis chuckles “Ed Graham is pathetic. Will has never been normal and never will be. You think Ed’s not a foolish man but I can assure you he is. He’s delusional if he thinks a few more months of what he deems to be normality will make an ounce of difference to Will’s life.”

“You’ve been playing me from the start.” Jack says his voice rough with words kept silent. “You… I looked up to you. I trusted you…”

“You made it too easy. You were so self-righteous when I took you under my wing. At the time it was your biggest weakness.”

“So, you used it.” Jack says

“Of course, I did. It would have been a waste not to. Not when you put it so clearly on display”

“I thought you *really wanted* to save him, but you just wanted to keep him hidden. You didn’t want anyone else playing with your shinny new toy. Not until you had the power you needed to keep him all to yourself.”

Davis nods “yes. But any reasonable man would have, he was the only survivor of the latest generation of red-files. If he proved to be a pretender and some pathetic power grabbing ape on a mission to prove himself got him…”

“You’d never get a chance to steal the power for yourself.” Jack finishes irritably.

“Exactly, in the right hands a Pretender is a weapon of mass destruction, a virtually unbeatable foe. If anyone with more power than I had in Washington got to him first and he proved to be a Pretender? then all my ambitions would have been dead in the water. But keep him hidden until I have power enough to keep him to myself. To be the, *only one,* in control? Then I’d have the power to make this country unbeatable. An unstoppable force. The power to lay all our enemy’s asunder.”

“But Wills not a Pretender.” Jack says.

“Doesn’t matter, he is enough of one. A hybrid of some sort maybe. Still, he’s got enough skills to catch us one.”

“If I help you, if Will helps you catch Jarod, will you let him go?”

Davis looks at Jack like he’s an idiot “why would I do that? I don’t know exactly what the term would be for Will yet, he’s still such a mystery, but.” His smile drops and his eyes sharpen “He’s priceless to me Jack. I would kill ten thousand people without a thought if it meant I could keep him.”

Jack swallows “I understand” is what he says but all he feels is sorrow. “If you have the power to cover this up now… which means…”

He’d been a fool.

“You’re nearly there, the power you need, you nearly have it.” Jack says quietly “I was meant to be smart; I was meant to be gifted but I’m none of those things.”

Davis raises an eyebrow “Yes you are Jack, your IQ was constantly tested to be between 145 and 152. You’re just an under achiever, a disappointment; you could have been so much more but you’ve decided to settle as head of behavioral sciences at the FBI? You are content to waste your life catching killers, it’s a severe miss-use of resources.”

Jack stands up slowly “I suppose that’s fair. I disappoint you; you disappoint me.” Jack says. He doesn’t look at Will again, he can’t bring himself to. He leaves quietly. He doesn’t look back. The man he was last week is gone; a shadow left behind in a brighter, clearer defined past.

New Orleans

1972

“Shhhhh” Ed said when he woke Jack up.

Jack looked up only half awake, a small farrow on his brow. “Ed?” He asked.

“Come on, we going out.”

“Huh?” Jack asked groggily and sat up. Edward was already dressed and had his back pack on one shoulder ready to go.

“We need to make our selves scarce for the night. Moms been in one of those moods all week but tonight she was real in it. We have to go for our own sakes.”

“I don’t even know what you’re talking about?” Jack said.

“SHHHHHHHH!” Ed looked up at the door and listened “I’ll tell you when we out. Now *come on* and get dressed.”

Jack rolled his eyes but did as he was told, Ed had age on him which he hadn’t been letting him forget since he’d turned ten. It was supper annoying. Especially as Jack was at least as tall as Ed, and at least as smart. Two years was far less than Ed liked to make out.

When Ed had shut the front door quietly and they had made it down the stairs and were off down the road Jack asked again.

“What the actual hell Ed? I don’t have a clue what mood you mean?”

“You know,” Ed said “She been cleaning all the time, making everything extra nice. She made a heap of food and is getting really intense if we don’t eat it all.”

“So? I *like* her food.”

“She up all night every night.”

“Yeah! *she’s a night owl!*”

“She got angry at the fridge tonight. You saw her. Kept yellin at it to shut up!”

“I admit that was a bit strange…”

“Oh, for fucks sake Jack, you don’t get it. Just trust me, she in one of *those* moods. The dangerous ones. Its not safe for us to stay till it passes again.”

Jack scowls at him “You think you know best about everything since you turned ten, it’s getting annoying.”

Ed whirled around on him “I know about this. That’s all that matters.” He pulled his top up and turned around. “See that scar?”

Jack looked and did see a scar, a silver line a couple of inches long on his lower back towards his ribs on one side.

“I see it. So?” Jack said stubbornly.

Ed pulled his shirt back down and looked at Jack face on “Mom did that when she was in one of her moods. The voices told her I’d be better off dead. So, she decided to improve upon my life.”

“What do you mean?” Jack asks.

“I have to spell it out? I was *six* Jack, and not a giant like when you first came in. Small for my age, always have been. Had to run for my life in the middle of the night, bleeding where she cut me. With nowhere to go and no one else in the world but *her*.”

Jack looked at him closely “Sorry Ed,” he said “I know alone… I just, she doesn’t seem that crazy to me. We have to ruin everything over her weird mood?”

Ed shakes his head “She dangerous, I know you don’t wanna see it but you need ta learn to start paying attention, or you’ll find yourself dead one of these days.” He started walking “I ain’t always gonna be here to watch out for you little brother.”

Jack followed him “I look out for you too, it’s not just you.”

“I know it Jack,” Ed agrees “I know it. I’m just pissed right now is all. If they find out she’s lost it again then they’ll come looking to take me back. They find you there then they have you as a run-away and maybe even have her done for kidnapping… It’s just bad all around.”

“Kidnapping?” Jack asked incredulously “I went there on my own two legs.”

“You can’t just keep some random kid and not be telling no-one you got him, you was *missing* Jack, when they sent the police a checking we *hid* you. I know it when I say they’d not be all chummy with my mom over it.”

“We won’t go back though?” Jack asked worriedly “to the boys home?”

“Na Jack. We aren’t going back. We gotta find somewhere else to sleep till Mom comes out of it again. Then maybe we can head back home. Luckily no one will be hounding at the police to find us, no one cares a bit if we live or die big boy, that’s the way to live. We got each other, that’s enough to be getting on with.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope it was okay. It was a hard to write chapter and doesn't have much Will, poor wee follow. I'm a very mean writer. He will suffer but we all know how Hannibal cherishes it when he does.

Hope Hannibal doesn't creep anyone out too much.

Chapter Nineteen: Cry Me A River

Chapter Summary

Ed wants to die. Will does die.

Chapter Notes

warnings. some people might want to skip this chapter.

implied rape
suicidal ideation
unlawful imprisonment
child abuse
probably more...

Chapter Nineteen

Cry Me A River

New Orleans

1973

When the police find them, they try and run away. But turns out they aren't as fast as they thought they were. Not compared to adults.

They are separated.

Edward ends up somewhere else. A bad place for troubled boys.

He is in a cell that locks up at night.

He is shuffled from a locked class to a locked lunch-room to a locked bed-room. Don't speak unless spoken too. Always do as your told. Be quiet. Be good. Don't stand out.

Ed had always been a big mouth. He mouthed off, its just what he did. Big mistake. He's quiet now. But it's too late.

He cries at night. He likes to imagine Jack and his mom together somewhere nice. His mom takes her medication and is happy and well. Jack is growing even taller. He's calming down a little, growing up. He's happy too. But not guilty about it, at peace finally.

He likes to imagine coming home to them. Walking through the door they'd both be excited to see him. He'd get hugs and they'd laugh and play cards, just the three of them. They would have given his mom full custody of Jack because she'd promise to always take her medicine, and Jacks parents were dead anyway so why not?

They'd stay that way all together. Live happily ever after.

But it's not real. He can dream. Dream that she'd come and get him. Rescue him. But his mom has never fought for him. Not really. She's the sort of lady that likes the idea of being a mom. But when it comes to actually being one finds it's a bit annoying after all. All words, no effort.

He was a nice idea to her. That was all.

When the monster comes into his room that night he stays still, and tries to act asleep. His heart pounds so loudly, he whispers little prayers in his mind to a God he was never taught to believe in.

But no one comes for him. No one saves him. The man's hand is stroking his hair, he's whispering to Ed but he doesn't want to hear. He closes his eyes and floats away. He can see himself and the monster. He sees it all but he is numb. It hurts but he doesn't feel it. It burns painfully and terribly but that's not him. Its someone else. The small looking boy back in the bed below him, far, far away.

He's Empty. Pointless. Useless. He wish's he was never born. Wishes he could just die. Die. Die. DIE.

Dead. Dead. A funeral that no one attends. Except maybe Jack. Poor Jack crying alone, his parents gone and now his only friend. His only family.

He can't do it to him. He knows. He has to stay alive for his brother. He'll do it for Jack. He'll stay alive.

Undisclosed Location

May 1997

When Will woke up again there wasn't anything holding him down. He opens his eyes and looks around warily. He felt so tired, he'd never really felt tired before. Not like this, heavy and ackey, like he could curl up and keep sleeping. His head throbbed; his eyes hurt. He whimpered slightly as he sat up, the room spun a little and he had to stay still a moment for his vision to settle. His da was nowhere to be seen.

He was wearing only a hospital gown; he'd never worn one before and found he didn't like it. It was soft but flimsy and he felt unprotected in it. He sat up and stretched his limbs a bit. The room was large but sparce. All the monitors and people who had been in there earlier were gone.

The ceiling was high enough to encompass several floors, allowing for a large window over looking the entirety of the room he was in. He eyed it searching again for his da. There were people in there, some with suits on, others in lab coats, they were looking at him, making notes and talking. He looked for his uncle but he wasn't there either.

Gingerly he stood on his shaking legs. It was a strange sensation. The floor was cold, he found the feeling a little unpleasant, normally the cold breathed vigour into his bones. Now… Something was wrong. All the world felt different, unnatural.

Then a loud click sounded in the room and Will jumped and looked up at the window above again. Davis stood there. It had been some years since he'd last seen him but he'd know him anywhere.

"Welcome back to the land of the living Will." The man's voice was amplified through speakers in the room. It was too loud in here, too bright. It all hurt.

"Where's my da?" Will asks, his voice came out with a crock.

"Detained elsewhere." Davis answered.

"I need him," Will said pleadingly and then trying his best to swallow his fear and continue in a strong voice "please can I see him. I haven't done anything wrong this time." He cast a searching look around the room for an exit. A heavy looking door was on one wall, he walked over and pulled on it. It was locked. He shivered nervously.

"No. I'm afraid you can't right now, not until you've done some things for me." Davis replied.

Will tried again, hefting with all his strength. It didn't budge. He tried again and again. He couldn't cry. He wouldn't. He took a deep breath and turned and looked up at Davis.

"*I've haven't done anything wrong*; you *can't* keep me here. LET ME OUT!" his voice slowly rose in desperation and into a shout.

"I think you'll find *I can* young man. Now why don't you calm yourself down and take a seat at the table and we can get started. You help me and I'll help you hmm?"

Will folded his arms and glared up at Davis, but the force within that normally accompanied his anger was gone, with out it his anger felt shallow and empty. His eyes prickled but he griped his teeth hard. He couldn't cry now. He knew Davis would only like it if he did. Since last time he'd worked out what sort of person Davis was.

He'd replayed the Farmington incident and everything that'd followed over in his head in the years since. He had told himself that if he'd ever meet the man again, he'd not be so easily manipulated. But it was harder than he'd thought. Now he was here, alone. In a strange place. Feeling weak and wrong and tired. Afraid for his da, afraid he'd never see him again.

"No," Will said "I don't think so. Not this time, I'm not a little kid any more. Maybe I'll help you if you let me see my da."

Davis chuckled and looked at Will in a way more suited to a father dotting on his son. It was irritating. "You don't seem to understand your situation…"

"I understand my situation just fine YOU PSCOPATH," Will butted in angrily "This is *unlawful*, I know my rights YOU PATHETIC FUCKING BUGGER FACE!"

The room above had turned silent. Will could see the small crowd in their tiered seats had all gone still, frozen as they looked down at him. They were afraid of Davis, every single one.

Davis for his part just looked at Will without expression. Will couldn't look at his eyes, didn't want to. Was too afraid to know.

"I'm not afraid of you." Will added more quietly "But you obviously feel the need to hide up there. Why not come down here you fucken posser and talk to me face to face."

Davis raised an eye brow, a smile on his face but Will could tell somehow that he'd really pissed him off.

"You are in a truly fortunate situation *little Will*." The man said calmly "Nobody has ever talked to me like that and lived." The man leaned forward a little "But by now you know that I'll not kill you so you've got some confidence behind you. Confidence not unfounded. But here are some things you haven't got right."

Davis sits down in one of the chairs and leans back "Firstly, I am the law, when it comes to you, I am the law, and there is no one is above me. You have no rights unless I give them to you. You never have."

Davis reaches out his hand as someone paces him something that Will can't see from where he is, even when he cranes his neck to try and see the angle is all wrong.

Davis raises his eye brows at Will "The rights I give are gifts Will, I give them, have given them since the day I discovered your existence. I can take them away as well. Each and every one. Every person you've ever meet, your dog, your house, your tutor, your freedom, all gifts I gave to you. I would hate to be forced to burn them all down while you watch."

Will took a step back, and frowned, thump went his heart. Thump. Swallow, thump.

He backs back up, and keeps going. Thump. Goes his heart. Thump. He falters as his back hits the wall, but he looks up “what about the rest of you?” he tries, sounding weak even to himself “you all are okay with this? I’m a minor, and I will be for six more years. I know you can all do that math. You look like smart people.” Will looked from face to face but found no help “help me, please.” He implores hopelessly.

They all looked back without a reaction. Cold to his plight. Davis doesn’t even turn to look, to check if anyone is swayed even slightly. He is so sure of his power in this place.

“You can’t keep me here.” Will mutters suddenly filled with new fear, he looks from wall to wall. No way out. Thump. He couldn’t be kept here for ever surly? His da wouldn’t let them… but what realistically could he do. Nothing. His da wouldn’t be coming. THUMP. But his uncle Jack wouldn’t leave him here. His uncle was a man of action. If anyone was going to get him out of this mess it was him.

He looked back up at Davis “what about my Uncle Jack?” he asks his voice sounding impossibly small. “He’ll come and get me. You’ll see.” He says almost more to himself than Davis.

“Agent Crawford step forward pleases.” Davis says

His uncle steps out from the side, where he’d been all along. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

“Uncle Jack?” He asks and starts to cry. THUMP. THUMP THUUUUUUUUUUUUMP “please help me.” He begs.

His uncle Jack sighs and Will *knows*. Knows his uncle won’t help him. He’s standing *right* there but he’s not here to help him, he’s here with Davis, he’s helping Davis, he’s standing beside Davis who claps him on the back in a friendly manner “Jack works for me Will. Always has.”

He can’t get enough air, he can’t breathe. His hands go to his throat. Tears are falling down his face. He slips down the wall crying. Clutching at himself. Desperately trying to think. But what ever is wrong with him, its dulling his mind too. He can’t. can’t. can’t. can’t. can’t.

He’s in the air.

Flying high.

Like a diamond in the sky.

Twinkle, twinkle way off far.

Glinting, in a glowing reservoir.

Uncle Jack is far away.

He’s no hero anyway.

Twinkle, Twinkle way off far.

Flying higher.

He'll disappear.

He is distantly aware his body has collapsed to the ground. He's also vaguely aware of sound and touch. Someone is manhandling him. There are alarms blearing and people talking loudly, panicky, and someone is pounding on his chest. Beating at him.

Davis is yelling, he sounds upset. Very upset. Will is faintly pleased but he won't stay.

He fly's higher to get away. Away from them all and away from the pain.

Others come to join him; they all have wings. Like angels. They are beautiful. They talk to him but he has trouble hearing them. They hug him and feed him. They pull him to dance across the light of day.

"GET HIM BACK!" Davis is yelling. Fear, terrible fear courses through his veins. All he's been trying to build could die before his very eyes. Will's heart has stopped.

The worlds best doctors rush about. Will is smallish for his age. He looks tiny on the table that's been wheeled in.

His lips are blue and his skin in pale.

Some one is doing CPR another person is setting up intubation.

"You never did learn not to play with your food." Jack says next to him.

He glances at him; Jack stands inches him, invading his space. "You better hope that they save him." The man actually has the gall to whisper this threateningly into his ear.

Davis snarls and ignores him; he has bigger worries than Jack right now. Will doesn't look good. He doesn't look alive at all. The small body below doesn't look to be responding to anything they are doing.

He has never felt fear like this in his life. Everything he's worked towards will die if the boy does. Its unacceptable. The incompetence of those around him that let his happen even more so.

"So much fuss for such a little thing." He murmurs.

“There wasn’t anything *little* about Will.” Jack says without emotion, then and turns and walks away.

If Will can’t be saved, he’d have to deal with Jack too. Fuck it. Two pet projects in one day.

Chapter Twenty: In the Light of Day

Chapter Summary

A memory, an adventure and a look back from a new perspective.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is for: David_Dave_Davey who is the best proof reader/sounding board a writer can ask for. He writes the good stuff so go check out his stuff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty

In the Light of Day

New Orleans

1974

It was almost a year before Ed was allowed to return back to his old boy's home.

The day he was brought in it was breakfast time. He came in head bowed watching his shoes as he walked. Got his breakfast and sat down. He didn't look up; he slouched forward and ate fast.

"Why if it isn't old Edward Murray back again. I heard you were in hell."

He knew without looking it was Gorge. He slouched forward but readied his legs to dash if he needed to.

“Jack, did you see? Your old friend in the flesh.” Gorge continues.

He feels a number of boys surround him “I see him all right.” Says his brother’s voice.

“Say hi Edward.” Says Gorge.

“Hi” Eds voice cracks out quietly.

But then there’s a hand at the back of the neck and he’s struggling and fighting and the world is a buzz and bright. Before he knows it, he’s running.

He can hear the pounding of feet behind him, trailing in his wake. He doesn’t even notice which way he’s running when there are kids running at him from the other end of the hall. He’s surrounded.

“You fucken runt!” Gorge sounded furious “you made me bleed!”

Ed hunched in on himself, there was nowhere to go.

“Nothing to say! What happened to your witty come backs!” and then there was a hand grasping the front of his shirt and he forced himself still. “I asked you a question!”

Ed found he couldn’t answer, couldn’t talk back. Could only sink down, down, down into himself.

A hand lifted his chin and he came face to face with a very angry Gorge. There was blood on his lips, but Edward couldn't remember doing it.

"They done broke you!" Gorge smiles then, "kids come back from hell one of two ways, there's the ones that suffer, and the ones that break. But out of all the kids that goes in there, I never expected you to be one of the broke ones." Suddenly Ed was released and he felt himself fall to the ground and land in a kneel.

"What a fucken waste." Gorge mutters angrily "you're not going to be any fun no more, are you?" Then he viciously kicked Ed in the stomach. It hurt terribly and Ed curled up in on himself, but he knew he could take it.

"Stop that." Came Jacks voice then, he must have followed then.

"Ohhhhhhhhh, got your side kick back and you think you the man again." Gorge sniggers.

"Leave him alone or I'll pummel you into the ground." Jack says.

"You are in need of a good hiding." Gorge replies.

The next few moments are a blur of sound. Blows are being exchanged, but Ed doesn't look up.

Then yelling and more noise.

Then Gorge sounding very angry "Fine then, you can have him."

"Comon Ed." That's Jack, who he hasn't seen in so long he doesn't know how he remembers the sound of his voice, but he does.

Then Jack is helping him up and Ed is letting him. They go to their place, and Jack brings out the key. The space isn't big, and Ed decided he likes it like that. It feels cosy, safe. He finds his spot and Jack hands him his ball. He starts bouncing it and he thinks, maybe if he pretends, there might still be a piece of himself still in there after all.

In the light of day

All time

He floated in the light with them, dancing along streams of light and colours, similar to the strands on a violin bow.

The winged creatures were made of sound and light, their wings arching high into the air. They were humanoid it looks, but longer in form and older even in their ageless forms.

As he moved from one strand to other notes of beautiful sound would leap up and surround him, vibrating though him in cascades of warmth. He soon found his favourite tones and brought the strands together for his own delight. In that way he found himself surrounded in a delightful bliss of sound and light and joy.

The creatures it turned out were leading him somewhere, for at some stage they took his arms and lifted him to drift and float in between two strands to land in a forest of trees and flowers.

Sitting on a thrown of flowers was a creature not unlike the others, except bigger, grander, with flowing light rippling around it like ink spilling into water.

"Aodh," it said and he was led towards it "I have been waiting for you."

"Sorry," Will found himself saying, because he wasn't sure what he should be saying "I didn't mean to. I only just got here is all, I think, how long have I been here?"

The creature smiled at him "You have been here for all time, and for none at all."

"Oh," Will said "Your one of them, like the Ravenstag?"

It inclined its head.

"You talk like one." Will comments.

“Brandubh is our kin, he is kings-guard.” The creature said.

“Ha? Like those things in Sathurl?”

“The Sefir have their own kings-guard it is true,” it said and stood to approach Will “But you will find they are quite different to Brandubh, he is a creature of great knowledge, the only knowledge the Sefirin kings-guard have is of their own desires, serving the king has always aided them in this quest.”

“But not Brandubh?” Will asked.

“No, not him, he is a true guardian, it broke his heart, to be left kingless. It is a great fortune that he now has you.”

“Are there more like him?” Will asks curiously.

“Many, but he is their leader, and was left as guardian of the Tharn on Tarn, since we, the last of our kind died.”

“Tarn is earth and the peoples there?”

The creature inclined its head again.

“And the Sefir live in Sathural?”

Again, it inclined its head “most of them, but not all.”

“The Te Tharn? that is you?”

The creature smiles “We are the Te Tharn,” it leaned forward and so that’s it’s ocean-coloured eyes were but an inch from Wills “and you are the last.”

“I’m not like you.” Will said, surprised.

“Do you think so princeling?”

Will looked the creature up and down “I don’t glow.”

It laughed and added “I suppose in a way you are right. You are not just Te Tharn. You are a reconciliation eon in the making. The last guardian of Tarn.”

“I’m not dead then?” Will asks, far away he can hear them though, the people trying to save him, he can hear the terror in their voices.

“Even if your heart stops, even if your body is ripped apart, it will find a way. You are the last of our kind and cannot die.”

“Well, that sucks.” Will comments.

The creature reached out and ran its hand over the side of Wills face “It is a terrible burden to live,” it leaned forward and placed a kiss upon his forehead. “To be the only one who lives is

harder still. But it is our time to leave, and yours has just begun. We will have left this place of between forever by the time you open your eyes and will be forever beyond your reach. We are tired and *I* am ready to lay down into the void. But first you must meet the others…"

Will looked around and then he saw them. They were there like they'd always been there, like they'd been there the entire time. One was hard to see properly because of how it shone. The other was harder to see because it seemed to exist only as an absence of other things.

"There were three of us still in Tarn the night you were born. We were the most powerful of the Te Tharn, and so had agreed to stay behind when the others sacrificed themselves in the creation of Sathurl."

It bowed it's head and its wings shivered out sparks of light "But you might not have known Sathurl was made in the sacrifice of the lives of our kind, except for us, they are all gone. I am Ghanto, king of all Te Tharn, I am the bringer of life. This," here the being gestured to the space in-between "is Latoura, king of the dark and spaces unknown,
and this," the creature sweeps its arm towards the third creature "Is Atarlis, King of light."

The two other beings had come forward to the first and bowed in reverence to Ghanto.

"But if you are dead, how are you here?" Will asks.

"We sacrificed our Tarniun bodies on the night of your birth. It was required of us; we were no longer enough. We needed something more, something greater than we were individually."

Two other thrones sprung up, of grass and blossoms so that the other Te Tharn could sit.

"You were born and we died. But we could not leave completely yet, we held on with the last of my authority keeping us in a sort of life but not. We hid in the realms of Latoura and have been fed by the light of Atarlis. But it is a sort of strain, a long-tired wait. But now we have done our due and you are here at last, our son."

Will looked at them more carefully "What is that even supposed to mean?" Will asks.

"It means, that the last sacrifice made was for you. We gave you life and so we are your parents."

"I already have a father." Will comments and thinks of him suddenly, wondering what has happened to him and suddenly he can see him, right in front of him as if he was in the room with him.

He looks terrible, huddled up on a bed in a grey track suit. He's been locked up and looks frailer than Will could have imagined. He can taste it, a strange sort of taint seeps from his da.

"what's wrong with him?" He suddenly asks.

"Edward Graham is dying; his body has turned against him." Latoura's voice strung out like a ghost or a shiver against his spine. "A man of valour and kindness, a precious thing to lose."

“No.” Will says but it comes out only as a small, pained whisper.

He cannot deny what he can see, death has come to Ed Graham like it comes to all.

“I have to go back.” Will says reaching out to comfort his da but his hand can’t find Ed’s, he reaches out but they never meet. It is a strange, disjointed horror like running in a nightmare only to not move at all.

He tries again but with the same result, and his da is crying and he knows why, it’s because of him “I have to wake up.”

“You will soon, but first we must say out goodbye.” Ghanto says and reaches out to him.

Will turns away from his dad, he can’t bear to look at him any longer.

Warmth envelops him and he finds himself surrounded by the three beings.

“We haven’t much time left; we are soon to dissipate into the void. We had to wait until you were old enough to understand before we could go. We have called you here now because…”

The world tipped to the side.

“Hold tight!” Ghanto’s voice said.

Then Zane was there, and the world was uprightish again. Though it did seem to be growing smaller by the moment.

“My kings!” the squirrel said and bowed his head before them “I have come to bring him back, the wind is crying out his name so loudly the humans have herd it, for they sent me here to bring him back!”

Then other beings like them began appearing “It is time!” they cried out.

Then as one they turned to him and bowed, Ghanto and Latoura and Atarlis and all of those with them.

“Hail Aodh, a king for all!” they said and then Ghanto was before him and then leaning in so that their foreheads meet.

A great surge of breath burst into Will’s lungs and then Ghanto was gone. Then all of them, all but Zane and they were alone on a new ray of light.

“Come Aodh, it is time, they are gone.” Then Zane sat upon his shoulder and whispered into his ear. He ran and ran with speed and lightened steps until he was falling again, down.

Down…

Down…

Down….

He took a deep breath and then pain and coldness and Zane there upon his chest.

Undisclosed Location

May 1997

Sucking his breath back into the living had been excruciating, not just for his body but his mind. Will found that a connection he had never known had been there had been severed. It was them, the Te Tharn, they were gone, truly gone, and for good.

A gap in him had opened that hadn't been there before. He went to curl on his side to quench some of the pain in his belly where he felt it worst, but hands kept touching him, wrangling him this way and that. Trying to direct him, to intrude into his vision with a light in his eyes. He was crying, he was hurting. He was alone in a crowded room.

They managed to pull him strait, and he felt velcro straps find their way across his legs and chest. He let it happen, there was no point fighting. The lights above were blinding, so he closed his eyes.

He was being asked questions, he didn't answer.

Eventually the room grew quiet and still. A door was closing and locking with an electron click. Then footsteps and a chair being partly dragged with a painful squeak on the floor next to him.

Then a deep sigh, his uncle then. He should have herd it in the man's footsteps, but he was still not entirely feeling like himself.

"I've had them turn the brightness down." His uncle said in way of greeting.

Will started to cry hard now. He didn't know why or where it came from, only that it hurt.

He opened his eyes to see his uncle next to him watching him warily. "I'm sorry Will," He said, "I thought I was protecting you."

But Will couldn't reply right now. Could hear his uncles' words and wanted to reply but when he opened his mouth all that came out was sobbing and chocking and heavy breathing. His eyes squeezed shut to try and stop the tears. It made no difference, and he knew it was a lost cause when he felt his nose leaking.

His uncle sighed again, and Will felt a hand rest on his arm. He tried to twist away in instinct but could not with the straps holding him down being too firm and tight. His uncles hand stayed, a weight on his arm that would have been comforting from his da.

Eventually he managed to get himself under control. He took deep breaths in and out and closed his eyes to make everything more manageable.

“I’ve arranged for your release. You just have to help Davis with some things first, then you and Ed and I can be on our way.”

“Don’t see you tied down.” Will says bitterly.

“*Will,* don’t start. There’s no point in being sulky, it won’t help you. But if you are prepared to sit up at the table calmly like a big boy and have a talk, I’m more than happy to let you up.”

Will nods and manages to hold back the retort on the tip of his tongue.

His uncle signals someone up in the viewing room and then the door clicks and a group of people enter. Then another click and he knows it’s locked again. A shudder goes through him, he hates being locked up. His uncle leans over him then and he closes his eyes as his uncle rips open the velcro tabs. The sound is like sandpaper in his ears; Intense, painful and Irritating.

He sits up and looks about once he feels both sets of straps fall to the sides. He’s a little shaky, but considering he was just dead that doesn’t surprise him any.

He glances up at the viewing room and sees it is full, with Davis sitting in the front row his eyes glued to Will. Will pulls the finger at him because he can still do that. Davis just raises an eyebrow at him, there is amusement in the man’s eyes and Will finds that out of everything the most anger inducing. This is not amusing; *he* is not amusing.

His uncle is walking over to a table and chairs and Will follows him and sits down. He does his best to ignore the other people in the room. Most of them are dressed in military drab, its disconcerting. It reminds him of his trip in the helicopter all those years ago. There’s the odd doctor or scientist but they are busy fiddling with some machines. Will sits, hands sweeping over the table.

“First thing we have to talk about is the conditions of your release.” Jack said, and Will was painfully aware that the voice he was using wasn’t the one usually reserved for him. It was his work voice. His boss voice.

“But I didn’t do *anything wrong*!” Will finds himself saying “*Why* am I even here!”

He can feel the weight of Jack’s stare but he refuses to look up at him.

“Are you saying you don’t remember the shit show you put on at your home in Wolf Trap.”

Will shakes his head “Obviously.”

Jack is frustrated, he doesn't have to look up, he knows the man so well he can see his reactions in his head even though he tries his best to shut it off. But the images of his uncle burst their way in front of his eyes unbidden.

There is a buzz then "Turn your eyes to the far wall." That was Davis.

Will looks at the walls then see's one of them is large and flat and white and a projector has turned it into a giant screen split up into different angles. Will can see his house. Can see that its night and there are cameras all about it, only on the outside thank goodness. He wonders how he and his da had never noticed them, or thought to check. Clearly, they had not been paranoid enough.

He can tell from the angles and distances where abouts they are. One appears to be attached to that large tree by the drive, another is clearly attached under the ridge of roof on the house, another is on the shed.

He turns to look at Jack who is steady and unsurprised "You knew!" Will says, his voice higher than he had been expecting.

Jack just raises his eyebrows at Will.

"You knew they were watching us all along!" Will is incredulous and shocked but most of all he is just hurt. Painfully, achingly sad. His world shaken so hard from its roots that he finds himself with out balance in this new world with this new uncle. "I trusted you! *Da* trusted you!" Will shakes his head trying to knock the explosion of thoughts from his head.

Jack just nods "Ed still does he and I knew it was necessary," he says face blank from all emotion "now as for why you are here…" he gestures to the far wall with a jerk of the head.

Will looks to it too and watches what at first is nothing much. Its dark but the cameras obviously have night vision. It starts… the terror starts with a deer, the creature rushes about in a panic. Its eyes are wide and it is screaming "*He comes! He comes! He comes! He comes!*" over and over and Will finds his hands covering his ears, but he can't block it out.

The deer runs faster, but in no certain direction, Will is feeling what it was feeling, an inescapable terror like a high note playing at the base of his skull. Then a shadow comes, a strange thing in the night. A darkness and a whisper on the wind. "Danger." It says "Danger comes..."

Then the deer runs head first into the large tree in the fount of the house with a loud sicking thud. Its voice echoes up into the sky, an echo in Wills head "*He com*…." And stops. It dies nearly instantaneously. The darkness clings to the deer's body then, lifting it up like it is a puppeteer, the deer's body its puppet, the body walks, with a buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz and a shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz. Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz. Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

It looks up at the window, Will's bedroom window.

"No." Will thinks, dread filling his chest "Don't go in."

But he cannot stop what has already happened. It continues with its strange noises and dead eyes and with a jittery body it walks sideways up the house. Its grotesque, the creature's neck is jutting to the side at the wrong angle, but it looks worse now with its legs clippity clopping up the side of the house as if gravity wasn't a thing. Its shadow is moves on the wall, spreading out like vines, shifting and reaching out around it.

It reaches his window and the hands of the shadows reach out and open it. Inside Will knows he is sleeping.

Out side other animals begin to make an appearance. Animals he didn't know were nearby. Wolves are there padding about and sniffing, whining at each other. Squirrels and rabbits and other small animals it's harder to make out. Then birds, which should be roosting are arriving and landing all over the ground. It is soon crowded and loud. Then from the house comes the dead deer, and on its back is Will.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long. More life shit. Also this was just very hard for me to write. Should get a little easier now...

Chapter Twenty-One: It's Raining Innocence, Halleluiah

Chapter Summary

> Will is reunited with Zane. Jack is a but-face. Bella is of screen worrying to the point of anger. Davis is evil because Davis.

Chapter Notes

> Thanks to every one that reads this. It makes my day in these crazy times. This chapter is for my niece who is going through some shit but sometimes takes the time to help me with my spelling.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-One

It's Raining Innocence, Halleluiah

New Orleans

1975

"Edward Murray, come right away." The head of the home said, she was someone that Ed had an understanding of. She seemed to view children in the same manner as he did adults.

Ed looked up at Jack over the breakfast table "That'll be mom thinking she's all better again," He says and rolls his eyes "I'll meet you upstairs after."

Jack shakes his head "don't go with her if it is…" he looks around them quickly "they'll be watching more carefully this time. It won't be so easy for me to hide-out there again."

Ed stands "Since when we get a say on any of it." He says bitterly and turns to go.

Jack grabs Ed's arm before he takes more than a step "But you'll try?" he asks "to persuade them."

Ed looks at him in the eye "I'm still a tryer Jacky boy. I aint lost *that* yet."

Then Ed pulls away and follows the head of the boy's home to her office. His mom isn't there waiting for him though. It was two strangers, all dressed in fine suits and sitting awkwardly in the stiff old chairs set out for them.

"You must be Edward," One of the men stands and holds out his hand for Ed.

"I sure as hell aint anybody else." He says ignoring the hand.

The man doesn't seem bothered in the least, he sits down again and manages to look relaxed and dignified in the same measure as out of place "Why don't you have a seat and we can explain."

Ed shrugs and takes the last chair, a darkness blooming in his chest. He can't work out what this is all about, who these strangers were and why they wanted to see *him* of all people.

"We understand that your twelve now?" the same man asks. He speaks in a light friendly manner that gives nothing away and Ed finds it greats on his already broken nerves.

"Nearly thirteen." Ed says.

"And your mother is a Mrs. Lesley Murray?"

"Yeah, but she aint well even if she's saying she is." Ed says, happy to hear mention of his mom, surly this was about her wanting him back again after all.

"We know about her circumstances. But that's not why we're here. We work for your maternal grandmother" The man leaned forward "did you know you have a grandmother?"

Ed looks at him blankly, another adult to possibly have to contend with is not the welcome news it probably should have been "I sure as fuck hope so sir. Otherwise, my mom would be the immaculate conception…" he says with a small smile.

Rules of dealing with the fully grown,

One: Don't let them see you ruffled.

Two: Don't let them see how much you don't know. Knowledge is power.

Three: Never trust them.

The man had a moustache and Ed hated moustaches; they were distracting. He hated how they danced whenever the moustache wearer spoke. Hated how food or dead skin often came to be in them. He already knew when he got his first facial hair in, he'd be shaving it all right off again.

The man smiled “I can see you are not lacking in wit young man. I’m Mr. Reid your family’s attorney, this is my associate Mr. Bruce. Do you know what an attorney is?”

“I’m no fool, I know what a lawyer is Mr. Reid. But not what you got to do with me?” Ed asks.

Mr. Reid doesn’t drop his smile “I’m here because your grandmother would like to offer you a stable home.”

Ed was falling, his chest was tight. He wasn’t going anywhere else, not without Jack, not again.

“Would you like to see a photo of her?” The man kept on.

Mr. Bruce scrambled though some files and handed a photo to Mr. Reid. Apparently, Mr. Bruce couldn’t pass it to Ed, instead the adults had to play pass the parcel.

Mr. Reid smiled at Ed and handed it to him in person, like it was a great gift. Ed took it and looked down at the picture of an old lady. He supposed maybe he could see his mom in there a bit. It was the lips, thin and tight, and the slight upturn of the nose.

She looked rich and her smile looked forced like she needed someone to pull the cabbage from her arse. Ed handed it back.

“What she want me for?” Ed asks with a shrug.

Mr. Reid raised his eyebrows “You are her only living grandchild. Her intentions are to see to your future as her only heir. You will be inheriting a fortune; Mrs. Graham is a very wealthy lady from a very respected family….”

“She’s a snob then?” Ed asks loudly to be herd over the top of the man.

Mr. Reid pauses “You would insult the woman that means to give you a life most could only dream off?”

Ed shrugs “If the shoe fits. Besides I aint looking for a home or family. I got a mom….”

“Who is committed to a mental hospital….” Mr. Reid says smile fully dropped now.

“I don’t give a fuck where she is. She’s still my mom arsehole. She’s still got rights to be my mom that your old lady don’t.”

“Legally that is all going to be taken care of I can assure you.” Mr. Reid says “With or without your agreement.”

“Why are you even here then?” Ed asks.

“I would have liked for you to write a letter in support of your grandmothers wish’s.”

Ed leans back in his chair and took the man in again “I tell you what.” He says trying to look like he’s willing to play the game “I’ll write a letter and whatever else. But I have some conditions.”

Mr. Reid’s slippery smile returns “I think you have the wrong end of the stick here son. This is going to happen with or without your help. It was more a curtesy to let you know and to see if you would be willing to lend your support to help things alone. But even without it, this won’t be a problem. Either way Mrs. Graham is going to adopt you.” He stands up then and pushed the cresses from his suit.

Ed snorts “You think so, do you?” he sits up straighter and looks the man up and down in distain “I think you’ll find it’s not as simple as you imagine.” He says putting on the poshest voice he can manage.

Mr. Reid shakes his head “I’m afraid I’m a busy man…”

“And yet here you are, with time enough to bother me. Tell my *grandmother* I’ll come your way but she’s going ta wish I hadn’t.” he stands up and juts out his chest “If there’s one thing, I’m good at its making life hell for who I wanna.” He gave his own best slippery smile “And that’ll be what I do for her. I’ll run away and run amuck and burn down her stupid name. I’ll lie and steal and give her a new meaning for the word hell.”

Mr. Reid was now frowning.

Ed shrugs “Or; I’ll come along and make a real effort. I’ll won’t probably be perfect, but I won’t go outa my way to wreak things. It’s up to her. Tell her she can choose how it goes.” With that Ed heads to the door “and with that I must say good morning, sirs.” Over the top snobbish voice and all, he strides out without looking back.

Jack is laughing by the time Ed’s finished telling him the story. “The way I see it, she can have me the hard way or the easy way. If I were her, I’d take the easy but I’m game to give er hell.”

Undisclosed Location

May 1997

Will wishes he could block the scene from entering his mind, since once something has entered into it, it is never forgotten. But he is not a child anymore and his da has taught him it is better to face our fears than flee from them. So, he watches.

The deer's body walks into the middle of the animal crowd and sinks as if liquid into the dirt, the shadow sinks as well, but Will can see where it has a hold of a piece of him, a sort of unbending string binding them together. That piece of him that is caught leaves with the shadow and sinks down, down, down and away. He is light and shadow made like syrup and poured out on the ground.

The body of that Wills eyes are open but have become startling dark empty voids. His body stands there, surrounded by the crowd who without the shadow there to terrify them have begun speaking amongst themselves.

"Aodh" They whispered to each other "Aodh will return."

For a time, this is all that happens. Will watches knowing something else has to happen, something bad for his uncle to be so cold to him. Something *he* has done.

He waits and watches and quicks a look at his uncle who is still watching, expressionless.

Then the Will on the screen tenses, and a wave of something stirs up the animals and the grass and the leaves on the trees. It is silent and terrible, the hairs on the back of Wills neck stand on end. He wants to close his eyes, he wants to hide, something is very wrong, he can feel down to the soles of his feet.

Then that Will is screaming, and the animals are screaming, and the noise is like some imagined terror because nothing on this earth should sound like that. high pitched and desperate, and deep and pained and howlish.

The animals travel at speed and one by one they die but do not fall. He can feel their lives being snuffed out as they scream. They stay in the terrible vortex, twisted and broken. His playmates from long summer days spent running in the wildest places of Wolf Trap.

Then Will's dad is there, scrambling from the house, screaming. He does not even pause at the sight. His eyes are only on Will as he scrambles towards him. He is hit in the chaos with dead bodies and Will finds himself standing.

"Is da okay?" he asks shakily.

Thump.

"I… I didn't hurt him?"

Thump.

"He's fine, his injuries have been seen to, nothing too serious to worry about."

Will's chest hurts.

Thump.

His da makes it with arms out shielding himself and reaching for the scary Will on the video. He grabs a hold of that Will, who collapses. With Will's collapse the animals also fall,

tumbling straight down. They hit the ground with heavy thuds. His da is there in the middle of it all cradling him on the ground.

Thump.

His da is bleeding.

Thump.

Someone is calling his name, but their voice grows smaller and then he is on the floor. It is hard and cold, and his uncle is there again.

He feels something pouring out of him. His remaining innocence is oozing out all over the floor and its red.

“Will?” his voice is done being cold, he sounds shaken.

“Uncle Jack?” Will asks, his voice echos from a distant world.

His uncle helps him up and leads him back to the bed. Will faulters a little “what’s wrong with me?” he asks.

“It’s your new medication, they’ve been having trouble getting the dosage right. But it is one of the requirements of your release.”

“Ha?” Will asks confused.

He sits on the bed but then there are people there and Will panics again standing back up and grasping on to his uncle’s arm “don’t let them touch me!” he says franticly.

He doesn’t look at his uncle, but he knows already, the man is not someone to be reasoned with.

“*Will*… they need to check you over.”

“No!” Will insists and clings to the man still tighter “*please don’t let them touch me*.” His voice is barely a strained whisper.

“*Will* this *is* for your own good.” His uncle’s large hands are prying him from him and pushing him back onto the bed.

Will fights. He doesn't even mean too. There was no thought only panic. But then there are others there pushing him back down and the straps are back, and he is crying again.

“No!” cries out “please! I don’t like it! I want my da!”

No one cares.

Hands on him, a cold metal stethoscope on his chest, something growing painfully tight around his arm and another stethoscope below that. Hands. Voices. Talking. Needles taking

blood. Lights in his eyes. Questions. His uncle trying to convince him to answer and be helpful. His Uncle ignoring his cries.

Then they are done and return to the background and Will is laying still, staring at the ceiling.

“I want my da.” His voice sounds far away, like an echo.

“You will get to see him in three days. The three of us will be free to go then. But not if you keep this up.” His uncle sighs.

“So long suffering.” Will snips suddenly irritated.

“If you’re willing to start being helpful again, I’ll let you back up and we can continue.” Jack says and reaches forward to lay a hand on Will’s arm. “You need to be helpful Will, or you might never see Ed again.”

Will doesn’t reply, his chest is full to the brink with aching pain, and he feels if he should allow anymore in, he will burst open from the inside. If he is to survive then he cannot feel any more.

“Okay.” He says finally, because what else is there for him to do. But to give them what they want, whatever they want. He is not a person here; he’s just a racehorse being put through its strides.

If he ever wants to be anything else, himself again… Then he’s going to have to stop reacting. He’s going to have to make himself stone and ice. He’s going to have to feel not an inch more emotion. He will get through this and get out and he will never come back.

He takes a deep breath and lets his feelings pour away, out of his chest. They run across the ground and leak through the cracks, they dive down deeper until they reach the dirt. There they bloom into new life that buried deep has to wait. They flow away and leave him hollow but hard. Strong and unafraid.

The straps are gone, and he stands, his uncle reaches out to help but he pulls away.

His uncle sighs and Will smiles, he hopes it hurts.

Will sits down at the table again, but his uncle does not return to his seat.

“I am sorry Will, but for this next part I have been told you need to be kept seated.”

Will turns towards him to see what he means but his uncle has already lifted Velcro straps. For a moment Will goes to move, he lets fear back in. Then he remembers and drains that out too. He nods and places his arms onto the arms of the chair and his uncle straps one arm and then the next. Then he pauses but does not go sit back down.

Buzz “the legs too.” Buzz.

That’s king Davis, up on his throne.

Jack clears his throat and obeys. Good dog that he is. He straps both Will's legs to a bar at the bottom of the chair. Then the man stands again "comfy?" he asks.

"Sure, am Jack, you should try it for yourself." Will replies.

Jack sits back down choosing to ignore the comment.

Jack indicates back to the wall "we have the rest to watch" he says.

Will frowns and nods.

"But first some pads are going to be attached to your head with glue, don't worry it won't hurt." Jack supplies.

Then there are people attaching things to his head, its bald. How had he not noticed that? Was it the drugs slowing down his mind? Making him less aware?

It didn't matter, he decided. None of this mattered. It was nothing.

It doesn't take that long. He hates them all, every single one. For touching him. For doing any of it. He obviously wasn't here by his own free will. But they didn't care, it was their job and they were being paid to keep him here.

Then the movie of how he screwed things up so bad kept playing. His da carried his shaking body into the house and then nothing for some time.

And nothing but piles of dead bodies.

And nothing but death and pain strewn across his favorite running and jumping and leaping spots.

Then people were arriving, lots of people.

It was chaos. Chaos and mess.

And his da trying to get to him while he was taken away. His da struggling and getting put in a car.

His da's pain written all over his face.

The screen goes black for a second and then with a clunk it starts again.

This time there is himself on a hospital bed, covered in wires and strapped down. He recognizes the room he was in. This room.

He looked strange, but not dead.

"You were brain dead, but your body stayed alive. No one knows how." Jack comments.

Then there is a flash of light, blinding, blazing terrible light. Something is screaming his name and then the light fades Zane appears from within his chest, crawling out from inside

him like his body is more liquid than solid. Then his eyes open.

The screen goes blank.

He turns to Jack "*is he here?*" he asks urgently, because he can't lose anything else right now.

"Who?" Jack asks.

"*That squirrel! The one that*… the squirrel that was… don't worry." Will says.

He still doesn't know for sure if anyone else can even *see* Zane. What if they thought he was crazy and needed *more* medicine?

There was the sound of the door, opening and something being wheeled in. The door shut and Will resisted to urge to crane his head to see.

Not that it turned out he needed to. The cage sat upon a trolly and was wheeled beside Will, then lifted onto the table.

Will swallowed down anything he might say, Zane was in the cage, silent at the moment.

One of the scientists leaned by Jack "it should wake up any minute now" he said and left.

Jack was watching Will closely, "do you know this squirrel?" he asks flatly.

"You can see it?" Will asks in a small voice.

"Yes, Will I can. I can hardly believe it myself but there it is."

Will allows the relief to fall through him like all the other feelings that could distract him now. This wasn't good. This was bad.

"What does he look like to you?" Will asks curiously.

"A purple squirrel Will," Jack shakes his head "and I can't believe I'm saying this, with flowers growing out of its head."

"Okay," says Will "Just checking."

"So do you know it or not?"

Will nods "His name is Zane."

"I see." His uncle nods his head "and he talks to you?"

Will nods and looks at Zane carefully, he looks okay. But he should not be in a cage "They can't keep him" he says "he's not an animal."

"Then what is he Will?"

Will looks up at the ceiling and wonders how much it is safe to say.

“Will?”

Will sighs “Does it matter?”

“Yes, it matters, do you want to leave here in three days?”

Will can’t stay here, but neither can Zane “if he can leave in three days as well.”

“Will… *come-on*. This isn’t just about you, your dad’s not going anywhere either if you won’t play ball.”

“So what? I have to choose between my da and Zane?”

“I’m not the bad guy here Will, you know that right? I’m just trying to get the three of us out of here safely. But I can’t do that without you. You’ve got to do your bit as well.”

Will watches as Zane begins to stir from his sleep.

“I…” Will stalls, and then resigns himself “He is of the Tharn.”

“Okay, the Tharn? And what is that?” Jack is relentless in his questions, but Will can still see the image ingrained within of his da locked away and slowly dying. He cannot leave him there. He will not.

“I don’t know exactly. But they are different from animals… they are a bit more like us.” Will says and goes to move to reach out for Zane before he jerkily remembers he can’t. The small body is slowly shifting.

When Zane looks up Will looks away, he can’t bear to see right now.

“Aodh?”

Zane sounds smaller than normal. Shriveled and confused.

“Aodh? What does that mean Will?” Jack asks.

“You can hear him too…” Will is surprised, he is so used to being the only one to hear those who are not human. He shrugs his surprise away, he knew the Tharn were different. “It means me.” Will says.

“They have their own name for you?” His uncle leans forward, he is curious despite not wanting to be. He knows that in situations like this knowledge isn't power, it's dangerous.

Will shrugs again “It’s what they all call me. It means life itself I think.”

His uncle glances up to the viewing room then back at Will “you think or you know.”

“Sometimes the meanings of their words just make sense to me. I know it means me and life itself.”

“Wai essnac oom.” Zane says “wai Aodh raa.”

Jack leans forward “what was that Will?”

Will looks at the ceiling, he cannot bear to look at either Zane or his uncle. “Nothing” he says.

Buzz “do it” buzz.

Will frowns then and does look. Only he wishes he had not. There is something attached to the cage. It’s turned up and there is an awful noise. Zane is screaming. Crying and shaking. Will finds himself desperately trying to get to him but he can’t. Now he knows why he had to be held onto the chair. They were always going to do this. Always going to hurt Zane because of him.

He fights, he screams, he begs them to stop. THUMP. Begs his uncle to make them stop it. THUMP. His uncle is looking up, away. THUMP. Not at Will. Not at Zane. THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP. His vision is going black. Everything hurts.

Then it stops and Zane is a mess. A whimpering shuddering creature. THUMP.

“Zane!” Will calls. THUMP. “Zane are you okay?”

Zane is not uncurling, not talking. Just whimpering.

THUMP. Will fights again with all his strength. THUMP. A cool breeze. THUMP. The lights flicker. THUMP.

“*Why don’t you leave!*” Will cries “GO!”

There is a voice in the air, a trail on the ground. THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THHHHHHHHHHHUUUUUUUMMMMMP.

Nothing.

Blackness.

Gone.

“He’s coming back sir.”

Buzz “Get that dosage right or the next time his heart stops yours’s stops too.” Davis’s voice lacks any inflection. It is a dangerous sound. Buzz.

There is muttering around him, his uncle’s hand on his head, his mouth at his ear “I’m so sorry Will.” He whispers.

Then more blood is being drawn.

But Will knows he has to be stone. Be ice. Be sharp and hard and do what he has to. Survive this. Three days…. He can do it.

His uncle is back seated where he had been prior to his latest event and Zane is sitting up peering at him. “Why don’t you leave?” Will asks it.

“He’s been given the same medication you have.” His uncle replies “I expect whatever lets him travel like he does has been prevented by it.”

Will can’t afford to feel it right now, the reality. There is no escape for Zane.

Before his uncle can ask again Will answers Jacks previous question “He told me to stop telling you what he was saying.”

“I see.” His uncle looks at the creature and hesitates “You are going to ask this creature questions and tell us the answers. If either of you refuse…”

“I KNOW!” Will hisses angrily. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath and shows nothing. They deserve no piece of him. “I know. We’ll do it.”

Zane closes his eyes and bows his head at Will. Will has said it now, and Zane will obey even if he disagrees.

“Are there more of it?” Jack then asks, voice back to his workplace tone.

“Yes. Of Corse.” Will replies, a little taken back by the question for a moment, but of course Jack wouldn't know that.

Jack raises his eyebrows at Will but continues “can you make an estimate of numbers?”

Will thinks for a moment, but really, he has no idea. He looks at Zane who is looking back at him. “Wai aass tharn aeent aass hheen.” Zane answers without needing to be asked.

“He says many.” Will says, then “you’ll be better asking in human amounts, and he can say yes or no to it. Their numbers are different from ours and it’s hard to translate between them.”

“Okay then.” Jack eyes Davis who merely gestures for him to continue. “Are there at least a thousand.”

“Wai ta su.”

“Yes.” Will says to his uncle and then he looks up at Davis. Ignoring the crowd in the room with him he asks loudly “When I go in three days will you let Zane go also?”

Buzz “no.” Buzz.

“Why not?” Will asks and looks up into Davis’s eyes.

Buzz “why do you think?” Buzz. Davis has a single eyebrow raised and is looking at Will carefully.

“He… he’s valuable to you. He’s a marvel of science?” Will asks.

Buzz “yes. And?” Buzz.

“He’s proof of something important.” Will says when the information appears into his mind “He’s leverage over someone… not me. Someone else?”

Davis has stilled now. Will can see he is startled.

“Someone you want to use and then destroy.” Will says with a frown “Someone that will get you where you have to go.”

Buzz “yes.” Buzz.

Will sinks back down into his chair and looks at Zane “I’m sorry, this is all my fault. I’ve let you down.”

“Wai Aodh parg wai Aodh na ooohht”

“Will?” Jack asks him.

“He says he forgives me.” Will says.

“Okay then…. Are there at least one-hundred-thousand of your kind?” Jack asks then.

“Wai ta su.”

“Yes.”

“So ‘wai-ta-su’ means, yes?” Jack asks.

“Sort of,” Will replies with a frown “It’s more specific than that, he’s saying yes to what you asked.”

“And how would he say no to what I ask?” Jack continues.

Zane looks at him, his nose is twitching and Will knows he’s thinking the same thing as he is. He will possibly never see Zane again “wai ta un.”

Will looks at Jack “wai ta un.”

Jack lets out a breath he’d not known he’d been holding “All right then.” He looks up to where Davis is sitting “do we need to do this anymore?”

Buzz “I’ve got people who can take it from here.” Buzz.

People come back over then and pull the cage with Zane on back onto the trolly.

“*My king! My king!*” Zane is frantic as he is pulled away “You are king of *all Tarn* now! You are the ruler of this land, not *them*. Do not let them *tame* you!” Zane was shouting back at him. “You can save all of Tarn, you can be the hero-king foretold!”

Zane is being wheeled away now, around the ground the wheels squeak.

“You are the breath in the wind! The blood in the dirt!” then the door shuts and Will can hear him no more.

Will looked down at his lap when the door closed with a click.

“What was all of that?” Jack asks then.

Will doesn’t glance up “He said that you’re a slimy cesspool of a weasel that likes to lick Davis’s shit dripping arse-hole.”

“I know your angry at me Will, but maybe you took that a bit far.” Jack replies, not sounding amused in the slightest.

Will shrugs “Don’t worry Jack, he also said your better looking that a rhino’s ball-sacks.”

Jack sighs then, giving up. “If I undo the straps, will you stay seated?” Jack continues.

“Ah, yes obviously.”

“All right then,” Jack gets up and bends to unstrap Will again “We still have a lot we need to talk about.”

Will doesn’t reply. Just rubs his arms when they are un strapped, and then stretches out his legs when they are free.

“The conditions of your release, as you know the first one is that you co-operate while here.”

“Which I am.” Will adds.

Jack nods “which you are. The second is that when you are let out you will come and live with Bella and I.”

Will feels like snarling but instead breaths in deeply.

Jack is distracted for a moment by the flickering of the lights “Which I know will be difficult for you, but it’s no longer safe for you or Ed….”

“Don’t you think I know that!” Will bursts “I saw it too, whatever that was! I saw him get hurt again! *because of me!*” He takes another breath and closes his eyes. He has to stay calm. He has to not feel. He has to not care. It’s a matter of survival.

Jack stays silent for a bit, watching as Will manages to calm himself back down “And thirdly you will be on a strict regime of medications to help prevent any more outbursts.”

“You mean the ones that keep making me sick?” Will asks incredulously.

“The next three days will be used to get the dosage of each of the medications right.”

“How long will I have to take them?”

Jack frowned at him “Really Will? *this* is the point that you’re going to argue?”

“I… I just… what if there is another way?”

“Can you explain what happened in that video?”

“No.”

“Will, I need you to think *very hard for me*…”

“I AM! *I don’t remember*!”

“WELL, THAT’S NOT GOOD ENOUGH! They’ll need a better explanation for that tornado of death than that! What’s to stop that happening again!”

Will folds his arms and looks stubbornly back at the ceiling “I wasn’t awake for that part” he says.

Jack is nodding “exactly. You were asleep. You were not in control of yourself. There is nothing you can say to me to convince me that won’t happen again. These precautions are for *your own good* as well. Whether you can see it that way or not.”

Baltimore, Maryland

June 1997

Hannibal sat behind his desk in his new office, he was satisfied to finally have it exactly how he had envisaged when he had first seen the place. He knew without having to hunt where each carefully selected book in his vast collection was. He knew every detail of this room down to the grain of the wood in his ladder. He allowed a small feeling of accomplishment to sweep through him. He was ready.

His first patient however did not bode well for his time here, he was a rich but scruffy man who held himself in such low regard it had been months since he last showered. The reck of the man wafted long after when the man had left and even sat still in the air after Hannibal had cleaned his new chair.

Still, he needed to build up a reputation and said mans parents were very rich and well thought of amongst the Baltimore upper-class. So, for now he would have to endure such creatures and even help them to thrive.

His next patient was marginally better but excruciatingly boring and taciturn, he was glad to see the back of her when she left. For that day at least he had only two patients which was to be expected this early on even with a CV like his own.

Tonight at least the monotony would be broken. His last protégé lived locally and would be joining him for dinner. It would be nice to have a conversation with someone capable and learned enough to hold there own with him, and as well as that would be able to introduce him to other such people.

After said dinner he headed out to Wolf Trap so see if his scouts were correct about the residence of their missing princeling.

The address lacked the life he would have expected and he could see none of the tell tail clues to indicate the presence of the Tharn in or around the area, at least not for a while. The inside still seemed lived in, just neglected. Most interesting was the smell of sickness that lingered, he followed it's trail up into one of the bedrooms where the smell was strongest.

There was a man asleep in the bed. He stuck of cancer and drugs and despair. There were tissues spread out around the man that Hannibal could taste form where he stood, mucus and tears. Surly this was not the man who was raising Aodh? He poked around a little in the mans belongings but found little of interest. This man lived a plain and simple life with nothing to recommend it. He was boring and average and Hannibal found he hated him.

He tried the door to the other bed room and as he opened it the scent of Aodh rushed up to meet him so intensely that he felt momentarily spell bound and unable to move. He could only breath in that scent, letting the power of it rush over his body, filling his very cells with tiny shards of sun light.

Once the initial wave of it had abated, he stepped in and quietly closed the door behind him. The room was average at best and not at all suited to the likes of Aodh. It was disgraceful, disrespectable and rude…

Still, this was obviously Aodh's abode, though he was not here. He found a hair on his pillow and put it carefully into a snap lock bag for later. He could taste Aodh's sweat on the air, even better than fertilizer for bringing the smallest seeds to life. He stroked his hand over the bed spread and brought it up to his face.

This boy was truly the lord of life, Aodh born into Tarn completely lacking the knowledge of who or what he was. Which was perfect for his own plans.

He Did a quick scan through the room, taking note of the many books that filled the two book shelves and were stacked in piles by the bed and against one wall. That at least was pleasing.

Then with the same silence in which he had come, he left. Down the stairs and back outside. He was surprised to find the raven-stag waiting for him, he inclined his head as he approached it "Brandubh" he said in greeting.

The raven-stag bowed its head in respect "Lugh. I see you have found your way here."

“It appears so, though it seems I am late.”

“Aodh is adrift.” Brandubh replies “The humans seek to rule over him.”

Hannibal smiled and they began to walk back towards the trees “To seek to tame the breath of life and the soul of the wild is the quest of fools. They fail to see that such dreams will only call the monster within him to feast upon their children’s flesh.”

“That is your curse not his,” Brandubh replies “He has too much of us to be you.”

“He is the last of the Te Tharn,” Hannibal says, “The last piece of a wall I mean to crumble.”

Brandubh snorts angrily “You wish to destroy him and see your people restored to Tarn?”

“I am the king of an imprisoned people. A people I would see freed, there is no sin in that, even for you.”

“They will not be free; they will be dead. If you destroy Aodh then the Tharn and the children of Zahar will rise up to take our revenge. If you think us weak you will find us strong. If you touch what is ours, we will touch what is yours. Though my fear of you does not include the destruction of Aodh. The only fear we had of you has already been outwitted, the control you will crave to exert over his will, that will be your undoing, you will fight for this, but it will be your downfall. We knew what you would do, we have seen your face written across the sky's and so we brought forth a weapon to destroy you.” The black creature shook out its feathery hide. "The weapon cannot be stopped now, for it has been unleashed already."

"What weapon is this? if it is too late to stop it, please tell me?" Hannibal's face was blank, his eyes dark, curious but not concerned.

"The weapon is asleep upstairs." The Ravenstag replied proudly.

Hannibal’s head tilts slightly as he considers this “The arrogance of the Te Tharn destroyed them. If you have not learnt from their mistake, then you will fade into myth as well. Aodh does not just belong to you, he is son of three of three, he is not just the last Te Tharn and he will always be more than a simple human's son.”

“The Te Tharn gave his lifeless form breath and stirred his organs into life. Without the Te Tharn he would not be.”

“They played their part; it does not make their claim any greater.” Hannibal supplied “Now if you will excuse me, I have other things still to accomplish tonight. Good night old friend.”

“Good night, Lugh.” The Raven-stag replies “Do not come back here again, Edward Graham is under our protection.”

Hannibal nods “very well. I will not trespass again while Ed Graham resides here."

New Orleans

1975

“Now are you going to tell me what this is all about Mr. Reid or do I have to wring it out of you?” Mrs. Graham asked scathingly. They were seated comfortably in one of her sitting rooms drinking tea. Mr. Reid was not fond of tea but he drank it all the same.

“I’m afraid I was told as much as you. We will both have to wait till Mr. Davis decides to turn up.” Mr. Reid eyes the assortment of cakes, tarts and pastries but resists.

“I despise tardiness.” Mrs. Graham says “the nerve of the man, I am surprised you stand for it?”

“Unfortunately, I have discovered that Mr. Davis is not someone to scold.” Mr. Reid replies and shifts back, for someone with so much money Mrs. Graham owned only the most uncomfortable chairs.

“Hmm.” Mrs. Graham replies.

They fall into an uneasy silence, Reid keeping his eyes on the clock.

Finally, the man himself is shown into the room, Mr. Reid stands in greeting. Mrs. Graham is regally pissed and does not even deem to turn her head.

Mr. Davis seems unfazed and strides on over without need of invitation and seats himself down across from them. Then he leans forward and takes a cake from the stand and starts eating loudly without saying a single word.

Mr. Reid clears his throat nervously as Mrs. Graham appears to be unable to currently form words.

“Mr. Davis I am Mr. Reid….”

“I know who you are.” Mr. Davis says “No need for introductions, I’m just here to let you know that if you agree to my terms, you will have no issues adopting Edward. But if you refuse them, I’ll have that boy shipped off to the other side of the country never to be seen again.” He says it without force or worry and then chooses something else to eat.

Mrs. Graham gets her voice back then “Mr. Reid is this *man"* her lips curl up in disgust "even capable of following through on such a threat?”

“*This* man certainly is.” Davis says before Reid can say a thing. “Terrible what happened to your son and his wife wasn’t it? Wouldn’t want the last Graham going the same way, that’d be a terrible loss.”

Mrs. Graham eyes him “I take it that you are not one for an empty threat?”

Mr. Davis smiles “What do you think?”

Mrs. Graham snorts “I think I’ve met many a man like you Mr. Davis. Power hungry and dangerous you might be but I’ve survived your kind more times than I can count. My dear husband was one such man. It was truly tragic how he died.”

Davis nods “Yes, you pulled that off well madam I’ll give you that. But I’m not your husband, I don’t underestimate you because you’re a woman. I respect you for it, which is why I am here myself. I didn’t have to be, so consider yourself showered with respect.” He leaned back and looked at the old lady. “I can assure your adoption is a complete success and even deal with the mother for you if she proves difficult. I can be a very helpful friend or a very dangerous enemy. You decide.”

“Very well then.” Mrs. Graham said after a minute “It is so nice to welcome you into my home for the first time Mr. Davis. I do enjoy entertaining friends.”

Davis smiles at her, this one reaches his eyes “I never expected anything less from you. Your reputation proceeds you. But now for my terms and they are simple enough I assure you. There is another boy in the same home as your Edward. You will adopt him also, give him your name. Provide for him and treat him like one of your own. You will see to it that he receives the best possible education and opportunities.”

“That is *all*?” Mrs. Graham asks incredulously.

Chapter End Notes

Yes I am so obsessed I made up a language for this fic because I have too much time or something (I don't).

Chapter Twenty-two: High Tea in the Veins

Chapter Twenty-two

High Tea in the Veins

New Orleans, Garden District

1975

“Edward Graham” She said looking him over “That’s your name now, wear it with pride.”

“Yes ma’am” Ed Replied and saluted.

Jack elbowed him.

“And you,” the old lady said squinting at Jack “Jack Graham, my late Timothys indiscretion.” She walked around where they stood, looking up and down their tatty clothing with a small twist to her lips. “I rather hope you can keep a secret.”

“Of course, ma’am” Jack said, “I’ve become a bit of an expert over the years.”

“Does that mean we geta pretend to be cousins?” Ed asked.

“Yes Edward, you do *Get to*” Mrs. Graham said “We’ll have to work on your language if you are to fit in.”

Ed scowled “I’ll talk how I wanta thanks.”

“I do believe you told Mr. Reid that in exchange for Jack’s adoption that you would honestly and earnestly be trying to please me.”

Ed shrugged and sighed “Yes. Sorry ma’am.”

“Hmmm, for now that will do. Come.” Then she turned and led them upstairs.

“You will be expected downstairs for breakfast at 7 am sharp. I expect you both to be showered and dressed. Your beds will be made to my specifications, and you will be tidy. You will be waiting by your chairs when I enter the dining room.”

She stopped at the top of the stairs and turned right, down a long hall of carved wood and carpets. Art and expensive pieces of furniture were spread out with plenty of places to sit. At the end of the hall were two doors standing on opposite sides of the hall.

“These are your rooms.” She said “The school room is down the hall a little way. I will show you that later. You will be reporting there daily for school until I feel you are both ready to attend school with your pairs.”

“Yes ma’am” Both boys said.

“Good, I will let you both get settled. I will send someone to bring you down to lunch at twelve. Don’t be tardy. After lunch I have the tailor coming to see to getting you both a more appropriate wardrobe of clothing.”

Ed kept silent but only just. He’d turned red during the conversation.

“I hope that in time you will come to see Loblolly as your home, as such you may explore to your hearts content anywhere you wish except for my rooms. You will know them because they will be locked.” Her eyes were sharp as they appraised Ed again. “Welcome.” She said her voice softer “now if you will excuse me, I have a very busy schedule to keep.”

Ed and Jack watched her retreat and turned to each other. “Fucken ponce” Ed said “nothing wrong with our cloths. Fucken hate rich people”

Jack shrugged “I’m not that attached to mine to care if she wants to give me something fancy. Besides I think you *are* a rich person now.”

Ed frowned at him “Jacky boy, I’ll never be rich like that lady, but your gonna love it here, you like a bit of comfort for sure. I’d have rather kept my freedom, but at least we’ll stay together.”

“It’s a bit of a downgrade though” Jack replied with a smile “we were brothers, now we’re cousins.”

“We are nothing less than what we decide, we brothers always” Ed replied and opened the door to one of the rooms.

Undisclosed Location

May 1997

Will sat in the corner of the room, his head resting on his arms which were laying across his knees. He couldn't make himself sleep on the despised bed where he had suffered.

He did not want to sit at the table where the ghosts of Zane hunted him, not that he could escape them where he was either.

It was at least dark for now. He'd been given food and a blanket and left to his own devices. The blanket was pulled around his Sholders to block out the cold of the wall. He'd never felt like this before, uncomfortable and restless. The cold for the first time in his life could reach into him and chill him.

He fell into and out of sleep so often that it began to blur into confusion. He was hazy, with a pounding headache in his forehead.

He decided that this was what it must be to be ill. He'd imagined it plenty, so he had known what it was like. Only this time it didn't stop when his imagining did. It just kept going and going.

The lights turned on with an irritating buzz and Will found himself shielding his eyes from the flickering lights.

He heard the doors electronic lock buzz and two men came in and placed his breakfast at the table and left.

He didn't move.

Buzz "eat" buzz.

Will passionately raised his middle finger in the direction he knew Davis was but still pushed himself up and went to the table and sat. Facts were facts and Davis had Zane and his da.

He ate the tasteless and fast cooling oatmeal as quickly as he could manage. It was thick and hard to swallow. But finished it and pushed it away.

The men came back and took his tray without looking at or speaking to him.

Jack came in as they left and sat down opposite him.

"Good morning, Jack" Will said without looking up. "I hope you didn't sleep too well. I would hate to think about what it would say about you if you did… though at this point it wouldn't surprise me."

"I suppose I deserved that." Jack said and Will glanced up at the man whom he'd called uncle. He did look tiered; his eyes were a little swollen and bloodshot. That did bring Will some comfort.

"Davis is going to just hang out up there all day?" Will asked.

"What Davis does is Davis's business." He paused and swallowed "I'm going to have to put the straps back on." He said without inflection or emotion.

Will steeled himself, glanced up at Davis's unwavering gaze and nodded. He moved his arms to rest on the chair arms to make it easier for Jack.

There was a thick tension in the air, like a thunderstorm was about to rumble into the room. Will felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as he sensed more people enter the room and come up behind him.

He looked up at Davis as Jack secured him "you shouldn't be doing this." He said "I'm sorry that I lost control. I understand why you're doing this. But you shouldn't. Its going to make the Tharn very angry."

Buzz "I'm not worried." Davis said coldly. Buzz.

There was a jab in his arm as one of the nervous looking lab-coats shoved a needle in. He gasped. Sagged with wide eyes. He waited for a minute, until he had his breathing back under control. "Well, you should be." He rasped out. "They have a long memory for those who insult them." Will warned him "And I'm kind of there king so you might want to" he gasped. Slipping. Tried to focus "don't want a dipilo lomatic inso… dent."

His consciousness wavered, it was leaking out of his head onto the floor in colourful circles that danced and laughed at him "ammmmm I…"

"Will?" Jack asked him from far away.

"I'm sorrrrrrry uncle Jack. Its …. I didn't means to."

Was Jack frowning at him? "I don't know howwwwwwww. I wasssss. I thinks I gotsss… wooow. Highs?"

Jack watched with worry as Will began twisting his head back and forth as quick as he could "weeeeeeeeeeeeee!" he was exclaiming "weeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" and then he was giggling. "WEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAH!".

Jack looked up at Davis "At least someone is having a good day" he said scathingly. "Your people don't seem capable of getting the dosage right for anything. You might be losing your nak old man."

June 1997

Baltimore, Maryland

Will was unconscious when Jack carried him into the house wrapped in a blanket. Bella was waiting for him inside and as soon as he shut the door she was by his side. Checking him

over and then Will.

“We’re okay” he reassured though he was not certain if that would ever be true again.

“Ed?” She asked.

“Apparently he’s home, has been since nigh on the start.” Jack starts carrying Will upstairs. “Davis sent one of his Beter doctors with him, to get him back on his feet. He’s on some better treatment now. But still…” Jack fell silent.

“There’s nothing they can do?” Bella asked following him up.

“No. It’s terminal.” Jack says and turns into Will’s room and places him gently on the bed. He takes the blanket that Bella passes him and covers Will’s sleeping form.

Bella wraps her arms around Jacks side “I’m so sorry” she says.

Jack looks down at the sleeping boy “So am I” he replies.

Together they leave the room and head to the dining room where Jack rests his head on his hands.

“Has anyone told Ed?” Bella asks finally.

Jack shakes his head “I wish we’d never involved him. He… he’s dying and we’ve got to keep his son from him.”

“We’ll just have to have him over so much it’ll be like he lives here too.” Bella tries.

Jack shakes his head “He can’t be traveling backwards and forwards every day while he’s dying.”

“Well, he’ll just have to move in like we asked him to months ago!” Bella insisted.a

Jack shock his head “Davis has been clear. Limited contact. I can only risk deviating a little from his orders.” He sat up and reached across the table taking Bellas’s hand “I don’t need to tell you that we’re being watched”.

Bella looks down to where they’re hands meet “no, but what we do in our house is our business.”

“Not anymore.” Jack replied.

For some minutes the room fell silent and then Bella pulled her hand away and placed it on her lap “We’re not going to be able to protect them anymore. Davis is too powerful now and soon…”

“Davis has done a lot for me. He’s done a lot for Will and even Ed. He’s protected us thus far and I have to believe that he will keep doing that.”

Bella looked up sharply at Jack “Don’t be foolish Jack. I’ve warned you *time and again* about *that man*. He’s a snake and you know it! He does nothing without his own agenda. He wants to use Will to gain power and he doesn’t want to share that power. He’s been *using us* to keep him hidden from any rivals.”

“*And he’ll keep doing that!*” Jack insists.

“Until he’s sure enough that he has the power to keep him to himself!” Bella says imploringly “and you know that day is coming!”

Jack bowed his head again “Not yet. We’ve still got time.”

“Ed doesn’t.”

Chapter Twenty-three: Emperor of the Soal

Chapter Twenty-three

Emperor of the Soal

I saw you in the dark

Your face laid down next to mine

Blood dripping from your teeth

All over my ivory sheets

Eyes meet

Then we see

Reflections breach

Don't make a peep

We're dead

New Orleans, Garden District

1976

"I never thought I'd see the day." Mrs. Graham says with a genuine smile on her face.

Ed and Jack stood side by side beside the car having just had their picture taken. Trunks already packed away. They wore their new school uniforms looking every bit the young

gentlemen.

Jack smiled back “thank you grandmother.”

Ed shrugged “Yes, thank you grandmother.”

Mrs. Graham took a deep breath “Those who treat you like you are different or unworthy are beneath you. Remember that. Now of you go boys.”

The boys got into the car and with a small wave back were driven to their new boarding school.

Ed screwed up his face as soon as they were out onto the road and mimicked Jack “thank you grandmother. You even sound like a snob nowadays.”

Jack side eyed him “You could enjoy it too if you wanted. But your determined to be miserable even though you have a lot less to be miserable that you think you do.” He waved his hand dismissively “Sometimes I think you *want* to be miserable.”

Ed glared “Just remember it was me that got you here.”

Jack nods “I haven’t forgotten. You just seem to hate me for it now-a-days.”

Five hours later they arrive at their new school, a large wooden sign declared it as “Principium Preparatory School”.

It was large and built from stone, with turret like shapes gutting out from the side of the building at regular intervals. It looked older than it probably was and completely different from any school they had ever been to before.

There were many other boys mingling about the lawns outside, shaking hands and greeting each other after the long summer holidays.

Their car pulled up along the side of the looping drive way and their driver got out to help them with their trunks.

The driver left with a quick goodbye and they rolled their trunks further up towards the entrance. Jack began noticing the stares almost right away. Ed noticing only moments later.

“What do you reckon they all staring at?” Ed asked.

“I have a few ideas.” Jack replied tensely “common let’s just get in and find our dorm.” They rolled up through the large front doors and into the main building proper. From the foyer they could the office and headed that way.

“Are you the Grahams?” A tall blond-haired boy asked approaching them, hand out.

Jack stepped forward and shook hands with the other boy. “Yes, we are. I’m Jack”

“I’m Joshua Hartin.” The boy said and held his hand out to Ed.

Reluctantly Ed shook his hand “Ed.” he said.

The Boy nodded “I’m here to show you boys around and make sure you both know all the rules and ins and outs of the place”

“Right” Jack nodded “thank you. Much appreciated.”

Ed rolled his eyes “Thank you *so* much.”

“Right.” Joshua said with a small frown “This way, I’ll show you the grounds first. We have a fifty-meter indoor pool if you like swimming it’s free for anyone to use on the weekends.”

Baltimore, Maryland

June 1997

Will woke slowly. Like pulling his own mind up from a river, wrestling with it while it tried to escape his fishing lure.

It smelt like his uncle and aunt’s home, red oak and walnut. He could hear his da and Jack having an argument down stairs. He tried to move, to sit up and at first, he could not, a small panic set in before his limbs began to answer to his brains orders again. He tried to sit up again but his limbs were still stubborn in their weighty reluctance.

“Da!” he tries calling but it sounds whispery and far away.

He rolls to the side and manages to land on the floor on his hands and knees. “Da!” he tries again but without enough breath he struggled to make his voice heard. He crawls across the room to the door and pulls himself up on to his feet. He opens his door and leaning on the walls for stability he makes his way to the Crawford’s white stairs.

“HE’S MY SON, JACK!” Ed was ashen looking, leaning like his son on the wall just in the front door. Jack was blocking his way any further into the house with his body.

Will began making his way down the stairs on wobbly feet.

“YOU DON’T THINK I KNOW THAT! YOU THINK THIS IS WHAT I WANTED?” Jack shakes his head “NO ONE KNEW IT WOULD GO THIS WAY!”

“WELL, IT HAS GONE THIS WAY AND IM NOT LEAVING WITHOUT MY SON.”

He made it to the last step before his da noticed him, the man craned his neck to the side to see him past Jacks bulk and gasped "*what have they done to him?*" his lips are pulled back in horror.

Jack groans and moves aside "Will" he says sounding tiered.

Will lifts his arms and Ed rushes to Will and takes him into his arms. Will closes his eyes and allows himself to be rocked. "You're okay. I'm here now. You're going to be okay." Ed mutters into his ear. "Da I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to." Will says crying.

"I know son, I know. You have nothing to be sorry about." Ed says and squeezes him even tighter.

"You have to go Ed." Jack says tensely "Davis is dangerous."

Still clutching Will, Ed turns to leave "Then we'll go." He says levelly.

Jack closes his eyes "You can't take him."

"You going to stop me big boy?" Ed asks with a painful twist on his lips "you against me, is that it?"

Jack was shaking his head before the other man is finished "*No*. You *know* that. I've always been on your side, even when your *stubbornly* blind to it!"

Bella coms in the front door then and quickly takes in the scene playing out in the entrance "What on earth is going on?" she asks cooly. "Ed nice to see you up and about."

Ed grasps tighter onto Will "Bella." He says "Will and I are just on our way out."

"We're being watched. Davis has been waiting for this, he'll already be on his way." Bella says seriously "your smarter than this. We have to play by his rules but we'll think of something, we always do."

"I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR YOU TO THINK OF SOMETHING!" Ed's voice is gravely and stretched over his vocal cords painfully as he shouts trying to get either of his friends to listen to him. Then more quietly he adds "Tell Davis he *can'*t have him."

Will clenches his eyes shut and breathes in his father's scent. At any moment they could be separated again. All he wants is to go home. Go home with his da. Go back to normal. Play outside with Winston. Go fishing with his da. Go back to that. He was reaching for it with a desperation in his heart that hurt. It was only thing that would make anything okay again. So, he held on with all his might. Desperately and painfully hopeful.

Jack moves his bulk in front of the door "please don't do this." He pleads, with hands out. "I don't want to have to take him off you."

"*Move* Jack." Ed snarls.

"You know I can't do that." Jack says "*please* listen to me…"

Ed nods “So this is it. You both choose Davis over me… over Will?”

Bella moves closer with her hands up mimicking her husband “of course not.”

“That’s *not* what this is.” Jack says “We’re just trying to keep you both safe.”

“Still pulling the high and mighty after all these years Jackie boy. Still think I’m a wayward child and you been sent to show me the way? You still think you can fix me?” Ed’s anger shakes into rage, red flushes his skin for the first time in months “Well here’s some news, *I’m* not the broken one. But you… Davis has you by the throat and your fine with it.”

“That’s not fair Edward.” Bella says angrily “Jack has only ever fought for you. *You* might not know Jack any more, but *I* do and if you turn on him now, you’ll be losing your best advocate.”

Ed snarls her way “You two deserve each other… the same pompousness and arrogance.”

Several black cars pull up outside the house and in the drive.

Jack can hear them through the open front door, he doesn’t need to look, his heart skips a beat. “Ed, you need to listen to me.” He tries again, “Davis isn’t playing. He’s been planning this since the beginning and I can’t protect you from him if you won’t let me.”

“Will’s a child…. A *child* Jack! If you let Davis do this, he’ll destroy him!”

Ed’s arms tighten around Will as four men approach the front door. Jack sighs and shakes his head sadly but moves aside all the same. He knows when he’s lost, he looks away.

The men walk in and head strait to Ed who turns his back and tries to leave another way. But the men are not encumbered by a twelve-year-old boy and cancer. Ed growls when they catch up to him in the dining room. He struggles but It’s pointless as two of them hold Ed in place while a third wrenches Will into his arms and out of Eds. They are not gentle as Ed is put face down on the ground and handcuffed.

Will struggles weakly against the arms that are pulling him further away from his da. His body isn’t right, it’s become feeble now… sick, like the life has been sapped from his body. It’s like nothing he has ever known. He is helpless to stop this.

His da is weak and helpless. The hardest part for Will is hearing the sobbing and begging coming from the man on the floor. It was the sort of sound to tear into his chest and rip him apart.

“DA!” he shouts out and attempts to fight his way back to his father, thrashing and scratching and trying to bite down on any exposed skin “DA!... STOP IT! *DON’T TOUCH HIM!*”

But his attempts are futile with this new weak body. His limbs are captured in tight holds by another man and then placed into Velcro straps behind his back. He’s stomach down before he knows it and looking into the face of his father. He remembers a time when his father’s hands seemed big and strong. Now he sees a pale fragile man with wide eyes and wet cheeks.

It's as though he is looking into a mirror, the chemicals in their veins keep them weak. Poison and trauma bind them together, each a reflection of the other. "DA!" Will can't stop himself from crying out.

"It's going to be okay son." Ed is saying though Will does not know how present the man is. It's not just tears that make his checks wet, Will can see clearly sweat on his forehead, he's feverish.

Davis walks in and someone brings a chair from the table for him to sit in. He looks down at them, nether try to look back at the man.

"Jack." Davis finally says "I thought you said you had Ed under control?"

"I will…" Jack answers and Will notices the barely concealed contempt in the man's voice. He must have followed them in. Though he stands back by the door, he clearly doesn't want to be there.

Davis pulls out a gun and cocks it, then points it down at Ed's head. Ed closes his eyes.

"NO!" Will cries out "PLEASE! PLEASE! PLEASE! PLEASE! PLEASE!" he starts begging.

Davis ignores him, instead he is looking at Jack who steadily looks back at him "Kill him and you'll have to kill me too." He says simply.

"And me." Bella says stepping out from behind Jack and moving to stand in front of him. He doesn't let her and pushes her back with a look that she concedes to, instead standing next to him and offering him her own icy stare. Jack groans lightly and looks back at Davis stubbornly.

Davis nods to his men who move forward and raise their own loaded guns to their heads cocking them. Emotionless they wait for the order.

"That's not like you, Davis." Jack says "Wasting your investment like that."

Davis snorts "I believe You think you're playing with the big boys now Crawford?"

Jack rises his eye brows "no, just with you."

"You promised me you would keep Edward Graham under control. That he wouldn't be a problem. I knew he'd turn up, he's desperate. Desperate men are predictable." Davis smiles "like you Jack."

"I knew he would turn up as well, not because he's desperate, because he's a father. I knew a confrontation was inevitable. I planned on having it here. I planned on trying to explain the situation with out you getting involved. I had also hoped that Will would still be unconscious as you said he'd be until tonight."

Davis smirked.

“But you knew all that. You knew he’d wake up early and mess up my plans. You wanted an excuse to execute Ed.”

Davis clapped “atta boy Jack.” He said with a smile “you got me figured; I’m impressed.” He signals his men and the two with guns to Jack and Bella drop them and move away.

Jack nods towards Ed “and him” he says.

Davis turns to look at Will who is still begging quietly “that’s up to Will.”

Principium Preparatory School

1978

Ed stood on the roof of the main building of Principium Preparatory School. The toes of his shoes were inching over the edge. Tears were trickling down his cheeks. His tiered eyes had shrunken in from lack of sleep and appetite. He had a small tremble in his limbs.

After that bad place had gotten a hold of him a heavy black weight had settled itself upon his chest. It had grown and grown and seeped into him. Now it was dragging him towards the edge.

Last month he’d had the news he’d always known was coming, had feared it since he was a small child. His mother had finally cracked and had been found hanging in her hospital room at the asylum. He had never realised it growing up, he was a lot more like her than he’d ever thought. The same type of crazy that had been in her had been waiting for its turn in him. A darkness heavy and painful sapping everything good from his life.

When he had been young things had somehow been simpler. Horrible things had happened to him and he’d been weighted down a bit more but he had survived it. It’s not like it hadn’t hurt, or he hadn’t been angry. But as he had reached further into adolescence towards adulthood, he had come to realise that nothing was so easy any more. The darkness had grown and twisted itself into his ribs. Now what he had survived as a kid was crushing him and he didn’t want to live with the weight of it on him any longer.

Jack didn’t need him any longer, had made new friends and become his grandmother’s favourite. He was smarter and better at playing the social games needed to do well in this new world they’d found themselves thrust into.

Not that it hadn’t been hard for the younger boy, it had been. Ed had seen it. The struggles that came from having the hue of skin that seemed to anger those imbecilic enough to be

obsessed with skin pigmentation. But over time Jack had proven the lot of them wrong about him. He was top of all his classes even with being pushed forward two years into Ed's own year. He was king of the school rowing team and had taken to fencing like it was in his blood. Ed had not. Not for any of it.

Next to Jack Ed was a nobody. Untalented, unloved and unwanted. Whatever spark lived inside of Jack Crawford that led him to take whatever was given him and make it better, didn't live inside of Ed.

His own grandmother preferred Jack. He knew she could see the spark within the other boy. Could see the intelligence and unyielding, unbreaking nature of Jack.

Yes, Jack would be fine without him. Better than fine even.

As for the old lady, he'd grown to love his grandmother, but he knew she didn't need him either. Jack was like a surrogate son to her. Together they could be the family the other needed.

In the dark cracks of his mind, he could see them together at Christmas. Laughing at each other's shrewd jokes, they did not notice his absence. It would be like he'd never been there.

They were what mattered now. He wouldn't be the weight around their feet dragging them to the bottom and he refused to grow up to live his mother's painful lonely life.

He lent forward, ready to topple himself over the edge and out of this life when he noticed movement. There was something strange out there, on the edge of the sports field. Something large and black. "Hold your life, Edward Graham." Its voice shook into his skull echoing and leaving him feeling dizzy. He squatted. He wondered with terrified clarity if this was what his mother suffered?

"Come to me human. Meet me face to face, harbinger of life." Ed closed his eyes and shook his head trying to dislodge the noise from his skull.

"NOW boy, I do not wait long on the likes of you." The voice boomed and before Ed knew what he was doing he was marching down from the roof and back inside the building and to the stair well to journey down towards the creature from the woods.

He tried to shake himself out of whatever trance the beast had put him in but could not. He griped the hand railing hard to slow him down. But it just made his steps awkward. He watched his hand open the door and he stepped out and walked over the wet grass to the creature.

It was a strange thing. Blacker than black. Feathered. A great stag which looked as though it could crush him in an instant. He could see the contours of its body, even under the feathers he could tell it was all muscle.

"You lay your life down in worship to those who have made war on your body and mind?" it asked as Ed came before it, shivering so hard his teeth were rattling.

Ed shook his head “I don’t… I don’t understand.” He said quietly.

The creature stomped the ground with one of its large hooves and snorted in anger “*you know* of what I speck. Do not pretend ignorance with me *child*. You have had your body *defiled*; you have had your mind trapped in *torment*. I know this.” It moved closer its flaring nostrils were just above his head. “I can *see it* written upon your forehead. Declaring to all of Tarn your pain” it backed back up and in a gentler tone said “It is a terrible sin; these tyrants have committed. An Unforgiveable evil.”

Ed felt renewed prickling in his eyes and tried to blink it away. But failed and new tears rolled down his checks. He bowed his head to try and hide them a little.

“Human monsters who eat their own souls and you would lay your body down on an alter in worship of them?” the creature asked.

“I’m not…” Ed started.

“DO NOT LIE TO ME!” the creature bellowed. “I am no fool, I see what you have almost done. They tried to destroy you and you made them the *emperors of your soul*!”

“*I hate them…*”

“You hate them and yet keep them as your masters. You have *given* away the key to your life and let the tyrants hold it close, *let* them wield it.”

“You don’t understand.” Ed said stubbornly “you couldn’t. you don’t have an idea what it was like. What *my whole life’s* been like!”

The creature lowered its head “I know this pain. I have had a tyrant emperor seek my destruction. One *I chose*. I worshiped a tyrant and I nearly destroyed myself. Choose an emperor Edward, lest you are ruled over by a tyrant.”

“I don’t see how…” Ed began again.

“You *choose* the emperor of your soul. You decide what will rule you. You stand at the precipice. You can give a tyrant the rest of yourself *or* you can choose another ruler.”

Ed considers this “I don’t know if it’s a choice, what they did to me… I don’t know if there’s much of my soul left.”

“What you decide you choose. You can have a future. You are important to this world. You are to be a father to a child born of three of three. You will raise a child that will bring life to worlds and save this one. But not if you sacrifice yourself on this day. Not if you worship those who destroy. Death. You *must* overcome.”

Ed nods “it’s not as easy as you say. But…. I’ll try.”

The creature bows its head “Trying is honourable. If you always try …That is all I will ask on this day.”

The creature bows a little and turns to leave.

“What rules your soul?” Ed asks before it gets much further.

“I have had many rulers.” It says eyeing Ed with a tilt to its head “But for now it is you.”

Ed blinked and shook his head “ha?” he says.

The creature was already walking away “learn to hope again Edward Graham and you will be a father.”

Ed blinked and found himself standing back on the roof, the toes of his shoes hanging over the edge. He leaned over and looked down at the concrete below. He’d never considered that he might be a father one day. Crazy or not… he liked the idea. He could give a child a better life than his had been. He could protect them. He would love them and that would be enough.

I was in the night time

I was down on one knee

I was there beside you

But you couldn’t see me

Up there in the tree tops

Out there in the sea

You are always elsewhere

Dead, dead, dying to me

Chapter Twenty-Four: Moustache Man and the Tornado of Doom

Unknown Location

June 1997

The ordinary looking man, in a very ordinary suit with a very ordinary looking moustache and briefcase walked with purpose amongst the thong of ordinary people walking to their respective places of business. This man turned a corner and stopped at a Starbucks, which was indistinguishable between other Starbucks in most ways. Entering he did a quick scan of the room, brought himself a latte and sat down at one of the many free tables.

Another very ordinary looking man minus moustache soon arrived and also brought a latte; he sat down and together the men looked very ordinary. It was a very nondescript event in every way, except for the subject of conversation.

Moustache man slid a file to the other. “Whatever it is he’s planning we need to be at least one step ahead. He already has The Triumvirate in his court, but now with Curtis and Lee…”

“Have you heard anything from your man?” The other butts in.

The Moustache man shakes his head “my man was very clear that we can’t just dispose of the problem; Davis has made himself indispensable. But what he has found on him…. Well, look for yourself.”

The other man opens the file and begins to read. The writing appears to be gibberish to most, but this man is fluent. He pauses many times and glances at his companion. When he is done, he returns to file to Moustache.

“Crawford is the son of Davis’s first wife. Crawford grew up with Edward Graham, and Will is Edwards son.”

Moustache nods “So there is a connection there that ties him to this boy.”

The other man nods “Interestingly none of these people appear to be genetic relatives.” He frowns. “And as far as we know, the boy doesn’t legally exist…”

“We’ve been over this many a time…”

The other man holds up his hand “I have some gaps to fill… as you know Davis took a step back for a while to mentor Jack in the FBI.”

“But we know that wasn’t all he …”

The other man stops the moustache man with a hand raised “incidentally their last case together involved … The Triumvirate’s Delaware operation.” He then opens his brief case and places three photos on the table.

The first one is of a whirlwind of animals rising from the ground around a small form, in the background is a picturesque white house.

Moustache man’s eyes widen “Is that…?”

The other man nods “he has abilities that Davis means to keep for himself. But that’s not all, it looks like our young Will Graham appears out of nowhere right after that last case in Delaware.”

Mustache man grips his drink, “The boys from Blue Cove. So, it’s confirmed then.” He picks up the other two photos, one of them is Will. The other one is… “you think he could be a new red file?”

The other man nods “and the resemblance is…”

“Striking.”

“Priority one?”

Both men leave in agreement, heading in opposite directions. Neither makes it home that night.

Baltimore, Maryland

June 1997

Will is hefted back up and his hands are re bound in front this time, he is seated at the table with Davis and Jack. Davis’s men stand over where Ed remains. Bella stays nearby him, refusing to leave the room. Davis allows this for now.

“You have caused us a great deal of trouble with that little show at your house… Bad people have found out about you.” Davis is leaning back in his chair looking relaxed. “You want to keep your father in one piece, then you’ll have to pay for him.” Davis begins placing photos out on the table in front of Will. Each of them has a different person’s face staring out at him in shades of grey. There are fourteen in total.

“You’ve been noticed, now I have a mess to clean up and you’re going to help me.” He puts his finger down on the table with a harsh tap “you’re going to tell me which of these people know about you.”

Will fidgets and looks out at the photos. “Are you going to kill them?”

“I’m going to clean up after your mess. If you decide your too moral for this, then you should know I’ll just have them all killed anyway and your father dies, I’m giving you an opportunity here to save lives.”

Will looks across the faces “okay.” He says quietly.

“Good choice.” Davis says.

Jack lets out a deep breath next to Will “it’s our only option.” He says encouragingly “their all from Davis’s world, none of them are innocent.”

Will could see drips of blood falling from the roof and landing splatter by splatter on the photos. Bringing stark color to the grey faces.

He picks up the first photo and wipes the blood away and looks. Cold eyes look back out at him. They have concrete edges blocking his view. He tries again, rubbing with his sleeve to remove the last of the blood.

“Will… What are you doing?” Jack asks curiously.

“Rubbing the blood off.” He mutters.

Jack raises his eyebrows at Will “there isn’t any blood.”

“You can’t see it, and I can’t see them.” Will says and shakes his head “I tried…. But their blocked off.”

Davis nods “I expected as much. I’ll have your dose adjusted for the next three days. Use that time to get me some answers.”

Ed is uncuffed and left where he is as Davis and his men leave.

Jack leans over and removes the restraints from Wills wrists. “I don’t need to tell you that you have to do what he wants?”

Will nods and wipes the tears from his face. His da has fallen unconscious.

Each morning two nurses turn up to the Crawford house and give Will the lower dose of his medicine. Slowly the fog and weakness lifts enough that the shroud of sickness that had been weighing him down is lifted. They have lowered his dose and in doing so woken him back up. He enjoys the strength in him returning. He can run and jump and hear the animals in the neighborhood chattering. It brings him comfort.

He still misses his da and Winston terribly. Missing Zane is a guilty pain behind his ribs battering his insides. But at least he can finally think.

He looks at the photos for hours a day. He can see them now. These people are lifelike again and terrible. His uncle is right. Some of them have thousands of deaths on their shoulders. But for these people it is a light burden. They know what they have done and feel no guilt.

He picks out twelve that know about him. He feels it would be justice to pick them all. At the time he remembers thinking that at least two have a reprieve.

When Davis returns, he is pleased with him, but Will can see that the man has already acted. No reprieve after all, not that Will can find it in himself to mind.

“Da is safe?” Will asks the man.

“Yes.”

“Can I stay on this dosage? I feel much better…” Will asks tentatively.

“You keep up with the good behavior then I don’t see why not.” Davis replies.

Will graces the man with a smile “thanks” he says earnestly.

Davis leaves after shaking Jacks hand, they are back to acting like friends again. Thought Will can see that it’s just a guise. Whatever friendship there might have been, has been burned away over the years.

Baltimore, Maryland

July 1997

The man angrily wrenches his car door open to find that his phone isn’t where he thought he’d left it. He frowns and looks back around, but no one is there. “Fuck” he swears and slams it shut again. He marches around to the trunk of the car and opens it up. He has one spare tire which will do him no good. He picks up his tire iron and throws it away angrily.

“Do you need help?” A voice asks from behind him.

He turns around, surprised that anyone else is in the empty carpark at this time of night. The man is well dressed and groomed, clearly not the trouble making sort and he wasn’t the sort of man to look a gift horse in the mouth.

“Have you got a phone on you?” He asks, “some arsehole has slashed my tires, and I can’t find mine.”

The man’s smile is small and sharp as he gets closer and reaches into his pocket. “Of course,” he says. “It’s lucky I happened upon you, it’s not wise to be out this late in this day and age without one. You never know if something could go wrong.”

The man turns back to shut his trunk “I had mine just a minute ago...” his voice is cut off with an impossibly strong arm gripping him around his throat. He struggles and tries kicking of the back bumper of the car, but Hannibal just turns with the momentum heaving the man away from the car and any more leverage.

Hannibal uses his other arm to hold true and firm. His preys’ struggles are useless against him, and his consciousness slips away. A pig to slaughter. He feels the pig’s muscles relax and he drops him to the ground. “Naughty little piggy.” He says with a smile “cutting people off is *very* rude. Whatever am I to do with you.”

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Cue horror music with brilliant violin strokes to **clash** and *grind* into your brain because Hannibal.

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Jack arrives and shuts of the engine of his car. He had enough going on at home to keep him occupied but apparently this was quite something and would require his personal involvement. He rubs his hand over his face and tris to wake himself up.

He gets out and is jolted a little bit awake by the crisp morning air. He joins the waiting police officer who leads him into the local MVA building. Jack can’t help but be taken aback by what he sees. He’s seen a shit load of unbelievable things in his time, but this was unquestionably up there.

On the counter sat the torso of the victim. His limbs had been cut off and by the look of the blood splatter his heart had still been beating at least for the first one or two. It made for a macabre pattern, like a faucet had been on full bore only to be slowly turned off the further around the body it went. The victims’ limbs themselves were suspended precisely from the roof just in front of were the torso sat at the edge of the counter, forming a decorative limb diamond. Someone had spent a great deal of time and effort on the show. Jack had a very bad feeling about this.

“Intelligent psychopath.” He muttered to himself then turning to one of his FBI agents he said louder “I want the whole team here for this one.”

Hannibal smiles at his guests, the first of many he will entertain with his spectacular edible brand of theatre. They are all smiles and applause, granting him his much-deserved admiration. He holds himself tall but with a slight humble slant, proud but not too much. Confident but not arrogant. They will see that touch of venerableness and see a human.

“Bon appetite” he says once the applause subsides.

The upstanding citizens of Baltimore’s elite Savor every last bite of the pig perfectly cooked for Hannibal’s enjoyment.

He allows himself a moment longer to take in the sight before taking a bite himself. The feeling of it sliding down to sit within his gut is euphoric. The flesh of humans has properties that preserve the likes of Hannibal indefinitely. It is named the so called ‘Curse of Zahar’. Of course, it was no curse to the Seefir, for them it was a blessing given to them by their father from the beginnings of time, their birthright.

Ed finished loading up his truck and locked up his storage locker. He had a long drive ahead of him and he wasn’t the man he used to be. He had been given months to live at his last appointment, and that was if he was lucky. He refused to be separated from his son for those last days. So, he was putting one of his old plans to use.

After New Orleans he had begun to prepare for the possibility of him and Will needing to go into hiding. But this new plan was better than his old one, for one thing he’d had help and for another he’d kept it secret from even Will, who had always hero-worshiped Jack. Ed had sent an S.O.S and said old friend was on his way to Baltimore at this very moment. The plan was a go, and he wasn’t going to let Jack, Bella or Davis stop him.

Chapter Twenty-Five: Jack-Rabbit

Chapter Twenty-Five

Jack-Rabbit

Baltimore, Maryland

July 1997

“Bella?” Jack asked after picking up his phone.

“I’ve been called into work, its urgent.” She says, “Will says he’s fine on his own.”

Jack hums “We all need to try and get back to normal. There's always someone watching, the kid can’t get into too much trouble.”

“That’s not what worries me. He’s changing in ways that will harm him. All this self-imposed isolation isn't good for him.”

“He’s growing up, hormones will be starting to come in and he’s been through some rough stuff, but he’ll pull through. He always does.”

“I hope so. I’ve got to go in either way. I’ll probably be home late, so don’t wait up.”

“Okay,” Jack answers “I love you.”

“I love you too. Bye.” The phone clicks off.

Jack dials up one of the men watching their house “Just letting you know the wife is heading out. So, the kid will be there alone.”

“Okay sir, not to worry we’ve got it here.”

“Good.” Jack replies and hangs up. One less thing for him to worry about.

The silver sedan was driving a little fast for the suburban road it travelled on. As it rounded the bend before the Crawford home it sped up further, until it was speeding at 76 mph along the strait. When it swerved at the last moment and hit the front window of the house across the street it shocked the street from silence into sharp sound and the long beep of a broken car horn. Glass was laid out around like sharp confetti. The car had broken all the way into the living room and was pinning an unlucky man against the far wall. Blood was trickling down from his mouth and his eyes were open but unmoving. Pale and shocked and very dead.

Another car having witnessed the event pulls up and the driver runs inside to check to see if anyone needed help in the house or car. He had punched 911 into his phone and was talking to the dispatcher as he clambered over debris. He found the dead man first and quickly told the dispatcher in a panicky voice, he'd never seen a dead person before. He moved forward tripped on some debris and dropped his phone.

That was when men who must have been on the premises came into what was left of the room. They were calm as they worked busily, searching the rubble for anything incriminating. “Call it in.” one said, “No driver I repeat no driver.” Then with more urgency “you herd him, get over there!”

“Who are you?” one of the men noticed the newcomer who was fumbling back to his feet looking pale and shaken by the whole situation. “Brian Thomas, I…. I was just coming down the opposite direction… I saw… I’ve called the police.”

But already a gun was turned on him “Phillips contain the witness, Milton and Granger get the kid over here now.”

Men began breaking off and going separate ways while the bewildered civilian was cuffed at gun point and lead further into the house.

“Davis, we’ve had an incident.” Said the man who had been giving out orders, his phone was held tightly to his ear. “The police are on their way. I’ve sent Milton and Granger to secure the boy. But this is going to cause a stir if we don’t get onto of it right away … and we’ve got a civilian witness… Yes…. I’ll take care of it myself.”

He walked into the hall where Phillips was pushing Brian Thomas into a closet. “Don’t bother, get him out of here now. He’s collateral, take his car as well we don't want this linked back to the Crawford place. You know what to do.”

The cuffed man who was trembling seemed to have worked out what was happening “I didn’t see anything! Please! I was only trying to help…. I…” he was cut off by Phillips who punched him in the gut, sending the man keeling over. “Yes sir. Right away.”

Duct tape was quickly commandeered and Brians mouth was covered, and a black hood was placed over his head. Brian was dragged with the help of the boss back out to his own car.

The keys were still in the ignition and with a few more punches Brian was wrangled into the trunk. He was hyperventilating as the car started, wet tears sticking the fabric to his face.

The witness was just leaving when Milton and Granger came back with a very sullen Will Graham whose hands were zip tied in front of him. “Good, take him now. You’ll get a call once you’re on your way with the address of a safe house. Keep him there until you hear otherwise.” Then the man took out his phone and went back inside.

“Come on kid.” Milton said and led the boy to a black town car.

“My uncles in the FBI, can’t you call him?” Will tries for the tenth time.

Both men ignore the request and Granger opens one of the back doors for him. He is pushed in, and Milton secures his belt before shutting the door. It’s locked automatically. There is black metal mesh between the front and back seats and Will swallows down the panic he feels when he’s trapped. A memory of helicopter blades shaking, the sound reverberating through his body came into his mind with jarring intensity. He pushed it out as quick as he could searching for anything else to focus on.

Granger takes the wheel and Milton the passenger seat. They set off carefully following the road rules and keeping to the speed limits. They don’t want to be stopped by police, the less collateral damage the better for everyone involved.

“That man who you guys put in the boot is going to die isn’t he?” Will asks accusingly.

The men keep eyes forward watching the road.

Will swings up his feet and begins kicking the metal mesh, smash, clang, bang bang bang. “PSYCOPATHS!” He screams "*I Know what you do!*"

“Oi *you little shit*!” Milton shouts angrily, twisting around in his seat to eyeball Will “if you don’t want anyone else to die, you’d better *shut the hell up!* people can’t know about you, *you little freak*. *Now* if we have to pull over and come back there to sort you out, you can guarantee that Davis isn’t going to be happy, so unless you want a sharp increase in that lovely drug cocktail they’re giving you, I suggest you sit tight and *shut the fuck up!*”

Will’s face is red, and his mouth puffs out a little before he blows out a harsh breath, but he lowers his feet all the same.

Milton’s phone rings and he picks it up “Yes sir…”

The man is back to ignoring Will who deflates in his seat.

“Yes sir. It’s done.” Milton says and hangs up his phone. He looks over at his co-worker “The angel house.” He says, “fucken eight, nine hours away, it could have been a closer one.”

“We can do a swap over at the usual spot.” Granger says.

“Rocky Mount?” Milton asks.

Granger keeping his eyes on the road nods “hmm.” He agrees.

They never make it that far.

“Their car was found on the side of the road heading into Richmond on I-95 heading south. Across from a ‘BC Wood Products’.” Davis explains sitting in Jacks seat in Jacks office.

Jack for his part is silent. But Davis can smell the anger rolling from the man, even though he stays silent.

“Milton and Granger have been found naked, bound with duct tape to trees. We have had to pay of the locals who found them and confiscate several cameras from wannabe journalists.” Davis pauses “This isn’t the disaster we initially thought it was however.”

Jack just stares back at the man coldly as Davis pulls out some photos.

“These are some of the photos that were found on the confiscated cameras.”

He slides them across to Jack who picks them up and looks through them.

“See anything interesting?” Davis asks.

Jack doesn’t respond at first, looking though them. He stops on one photo in particular.

A man stands next to one of the unconscious men bound to the tree. He has his arms crossed and a smile on his face. His hair is dark, and his eyes are sharp. He looks like a hunter showing off his kill.

“Jarod.” Jack mutters to himself. “Will is with Jarod?”

Davis nods “and Edward Graham has somehow gone missing from his home even with the detail I have watching him twenty-four seven. They reported nothing out of the ordinary other than he was just gone when they were ordered into double check after the incident outside your house.”

“This isn’t a mistake.” Jack says and hands back the photos “he doesn’t make mistakes. He wants you to know he has Will.”

“Now though, if I catch one, I catch them both, and while Jarod might not make mistakes Ed and Will Graham do… this isn’t bad timing either. For now, Will can stay with him, he will be out of the way and away from any prying eyes.”

Jack raises an eyebrow's "things must be tense right now." Jack leans forward "what's wrong Davis, killing off all your rivals hasn't gotten you what you want?"

Davis smiles back at him "Not yet. But it will and when I am heading up this great country you won't be working for the FBI anymore."

"Have you considered I want to work for the FBI."

Davis shrugs "wait and see. I'm sure your wife would be very supportive of a promotion."

Jacks sits back "you have us all right where you want us." Jack pauses and picks up a photo from his desk, it's of the four of them, himself, Bella, Ed and Will. "Just how many of the red files do you have safely locked away?"

Davis shrugs "you'll probably never know."

"Still, all that brainpower and you still haven't gotten what you want the most." Jack says, "and unless someone slips up you never will."

"no one is foolproof Jack, remember that."

Jack raises his eyebrows sharply "I thought that was the reason why you wanted him in the first place."

"All it takes is one mistake, one weakness" Davis shrugs "one illness, or chance encounter and my brainpower will have him locked up tighter than even he can wiggle out of."

"I could help you with that." Jack finds himself offering suddenly grasping at straws maybe, but worth a shot.

Davis frowns at him "I assume there's something you want?"

"Leave Will alone. You don't need them both." Jack says leaning forward elbows on the desk.

Davis laughs "Uncle Jack!" he reaches forward and takes Jacks hand before he pulls it back and yanks the man forward towards him "We don't know what your kid is, but whatever it is, it's very valuable. His little friend has told us that much. I'll admit I don't need another red file, but that's not what he is. He's something else, something powerful. You haven't earnt the right to keep that much power Jack. Will belongs to this country. For Bellas's sake you're going to have to accept that eventually."

Jack pales and pulls his hand back; he's not used to having to suppress the amount of rage coursing thought his veins in that moment.

Davis stands and comes around the desk and clasps Jack on the back in a one-handed hug "thata boy Jack."

Jack stiffens but doesn't react. He stares blankly forward as Davis leaves. He stares and thinks about the day he had first meet Ed all those years ago, so much smaller than he should

have been at that age. He had been small but tougher than any other kid in that place. He thinks about the day he brought home Will; how small and vulnerable he had been. He could only hope that Davis never found them.

His thoughts are interrupted by his phone, saving him from lingering too long on the past. He still has active investigations to get onto.

He leaves and heads for the lab to see what his people have made out of this latest case.

When he arrives the room is a hive of activity, so he claps his hands to get everyone's attention "Alright, what do we have?" he asks.

"This just keeps getting weirder and weirder, we found the victims drivers license in his mouth. He's also missing his kidneys and whoever removed them knew what they were doing." Price says.

"His family?" Jack asks.

"His wife says he's been under a lot of stress lately. They had found out just a couple of months ago that she had cancer, stage three. Nothing anyone can do now. But the couple has four kids and to top it off he'd found out a couple of days before he disappeared that a big investment, he'd had in Thailand had gone belly up."

"Could it be personal? Wife is dying and dying isn't cheap, he loses a lot of money and gets involved with the wrong people, something goes wrong and…" he whirls his hand for someone to carry on.

"He has some bruising around his neck but didn't die from strangulation. He died from blood loss, the man was alive while he was being cut into. At least for the part of it. He died sometime during his leg being amputated. Whoever did this, I've never seen anything like it."

"it's too elaborate to be a disgruntled money lender." Jack adds "whoever did this isn't doing this just out of anger… and they took a trophy. Have you found any similar crimes?"

"Nothing, whoever did this is new to the scene. Or has never killed like this."

"Maybe to *this* scene." Jack adds "But they've definitely killed before. He's left very little evidence and was relaxed enough to take his time. He knows what he's doing because he's done it before we just haven't looked at the right place yet."

"Jack!" one of his people comes rushing into the room "There's been another one, not five minutes ago left outside, dismembered in a shopping trolly."

Jack stays silent for a moment "All right you herd him! LET'S GO!"

Hannibal's latest pig was called George Harely and had cut in line at the grocery store checkout. Picking him had been in keeping with his theme for his current sounder. George was a middle-aged man who had nothing going for him. Poor and uneducated he was disenfranchised in life and delicious in death. His three older brothers would be forever changed without him, and their families would be affected by their grief. The work of his hands was far-reaching, invasive and delightful.

George was a better man dead, he was enjoyed for the flavors added by Hannibal, who had needed to improve upon the natural taste of dissatisfaction that permeated his meat.

The rest of George was also put to good use as a piece of art he'd put together for Jack Crawford. It featured three dismembered bodies arranged in a shopping trolly left just meters from the FBI. At first glance it looked as though it were full of produce. But the blood he'd poured over the top would quickly correct that assumption. He smiled with satisfaction and enjoyed another glorious mouthful of George.

Abigail Hobbs had liked Elise, for the small amount of time she'd known her. She'd liked all the girls. None were snooty or overly confident or irritating. They were friendly and would have made good friends if she had ever been able to have a friend. Her dad was a jealous man when it came to her time.

Still Elise had been the type of girl she could have imagined as a sister. She was funny and kind and smart and everything Abigail wanted to be herself. She has sat up night after night since imagining a different world. Where her dad woke up one day and decided to stop killing girls that looked just like her.

Will remembered meeting Jarod a long time ago. Back when his da had worked in a bar and Will had come by unannounced after school one day. He'd liked him then, liked his da having a friend. But other than that, he'd never given the man much of a thought. Still, it had been a

lucky chance since it was also how he knew the man was telling the truth when he'd told him he'd been sent by his da.

The sun was out, radio was on, and they were munching on snacks as they headed further and further away from Baltimore.

"Where did you say da was meeting us?" He asked.

"You'll see." Jarod replies "trust me, you'll like it."

Will swings his legs to the music "well now you've said it, I better."

"Your dad spent a long time finding the right place for you." Jarod replied, "This isn't unplanned or unexpected."

"Aunt Bella is going to be going crazy worrying about me." Will said with a hint of gilt plaguing him "and probably Jack is too." He added knowingly.

"Davis knows you're with me and will probably already have told Jack. He loves gloating, and Jack's always been his favorite pet."

Chapter Twenty-Six: Trails and Tales

Chapter Twenty-Six

Trails and Tales

This chapter is for Zackos, I left something hidden between the lines for you to find. Happy spotting.

There are Pretenders among us.

Geniuses with the ability to become anyone they want to be.

In 1963 a corporation known as The Centre isolated a young Pretender named Jarod and exploited his genius for their research.

Then, one day, their Pretender ran away…

In the Aon

The beginnings of time

In another universe, that called from itself a being of power, was the being. It was called Aon which was the one that had been called. But Aon was alone and lonely. Aon stretched out from itself in search of meaning but found nothing calling back.

For millennia Aon was alone and thought not of others, because there was not such a thing in existence. Aon filled the universe with burning lights and gases in a spectacular array. Aon marveled at the beauty of what was made but when it was done, found that they were still alone.

The spaces between where darkness dwelt began to cause great pain to Aon. Aon was falling into darkness, until Aon called out for help.

In great pain Aon ripped their own heart from there breast and called it Asahel. Aon heard a voice, the very first voice not Aon's own that Aon had heard. Aon found that Asahel spoke with a separate voice and with their own separate thoughts.

Wonderous at their discovery, Aon pulled their stomach from their belly and called it Zahar and again Zahar had their own voice and so feeling powerful Aon pulled out their mind from their head and called it Hamza. Knowing their own aloneness and wanting more for their children, Aon moldered them together in an embrace where the children continued to mold themselves to fit together. Aon held them in their hands and watched them grew, listened to their voices. In them Aon found themselves not alone.

But there came a time when Asahel, Zahar and Hamza had grown into themselves. They sort to see what there was to be seen and so left Aon. Together they sort to see the universe and discover for themselves its depths.

Finding themself alone Aon became lonely and sort to bring their children back. Aon was greedy and wished to hold them forever to their chest in eternal embrace. The three found themselves unable to escape Aon's embrace and in their pain fell into silence.

Aon was not alone but Aon was lonely, silence is death.

Baltimore, Maryland

July 1997

"Come on *love*, sit down with me," Jack implored again, his hand palm up and inviting.

Bella was pacing by the phone, her arms crossed over her chest. She didn't even pause to consider his invitation; her nerves were too frayed.

"I understand that you might be able to relax while Ed and Will are missing," she scowled at him, a pained look on her beautiful face, "but I can't."

Jack sighed and shook his head slightly, but before he could speak, Bella snarled at him, "Do you even care, Jack? You... you never understood. Will is mine! I love him!" She was pacing faster now, moving away from Jack, but he could see her hands rise to her face. She was wiping away what he knew to be tears.

Jack stayed silent for a few long minutes, considering. Pain was prickling at the surface of his mind. "Just because I don't express it the same way you do doesn't mean this is hurting me any less," he said quietly. "I don't need to remind you what Ed means to me; I wouldn't even be here if it weren't for him. He's the only good piece of my childhood I have. So, if you think this is hurting me less than you…" he shook his head, "then you don't know me at all."

Bella kept wiping her eyes and continued her endless pacing back and forth, waiting out the long wait. She refused to reply to his assertion, refusing to think about him right now, not when all her energy was taken up with Will.

Still, it was she who broke the silence. "Where did you get him from? That night when you brought him home with you... and I'm not looking for any more stories. I want the truth, and I don't care if it's dangerous for me to know. I need this, Jack."

Jack remained turned away for a while longer, giving himself a much-needed moment to think. Bella was already in danger because of him, and that danger had steadily grown as the years had passed by. He couldn't change that now, but maybe he could stop all the lies that were building up between them. He turned back to her; his face was still and devoid of any emotion. "I'll show you," he said seriously. "I'll show you where he came from." There was a rare crack in his voice as Bella looked at him, pain meeting pain.

Route 2

July 1997

Will aged 12

Jarod was mostly silent after picking him up, Will could tell the man's mind was buzzing. He kept shifting, his eyes alert and searching for any anomalies in their surroundings. They had already swapped cars twice and now they were in an indiscreet white Ford Taurus. It had the smell of recently being serviced and there was a pine shaped air freshener hanging over the dashboard.

His da liked to chat and drive, a lot of the time he used the car as a place to catch up with him. Will preferred this because it was easier for him when he was sitting side by side with someone. Less intense and invasive. He thought of the last time he'd seen him and tried to shake the memory out of his mind.

“How long till we get to da?” he asks, rubbing his legs to remove some of the sweat from his hands, another thing he didn’t like… initiating the conversation. His da made everything so much simpler for him.

Jarod wasn’t anything like his da. Jarod saw things that most people missed. Will didn’t like being seen in the way he normally saw others. Jarod was an intimidating presence, a man who knew too much and understood even more.

Jarod glances at him, his eyes are sharp and intense and Will has been avoiding them at all cost. Jarod has dark hair and sharp cheekbones that give his face a well-defined look. Will knows he’s making an effort to be gentle with him. But Will has secrets he doesn’t want the man understanding.

“Your dad is safe. You don’t have to worry about him. I had a friend take him to the safe house. We’ll meet him there in two days. We’re not taking a direct route; I wouldn’t want anyone to find either of you.” Jarod is looking over at Will and swallows hard “You and your dad are going to be safe there, I promise.”

Will notes that Jarod’s tone has softened with the subject of his da.

“He’s dying.” Wills traitorous voice chooses that moment to break, he fights the sting in his eyes. He doesn’t know why he said it at all. He checks himself, reminds himself not to trust this stranger. To not trust anyone but his da. But somehow despite Wills wariness, Jarod seems to invite trust in those around him.

“I know” Jarod lowers his eyes “I’m sorry. Out of all the people I’ve meet Edward Graham deserves it the least.”

Will shrugs “People don’t normally get what they deserve. They get what they’re given.”

“Not always.” Jarod’s voice drops into a deeper timber “Some things we have the power to change.”

Will scoffs, a frown darkening his expression “Not when your twelve and the actual government is against you.”

“You’re not alone Will. You’ve got people fighting for you, people like your father and your Aunt Bella who only want what’s best for you.” Jarod says and turns off towards a cheap motel with its vacancy sign flashing uninvitedly, casting an array of lights on the wet concreate of the carpark.

Jarod Pulls up outside the office but stills for a moment “When I look at you, I don’t see someone helpless or weak. I would hope that’s not what you see.”

Once everything is organized Jarod lets them into their room. Will doesn’t have anything, but Jarod brings in several bags and a silver-colored metal briefcase.

The room has twin beds and brown carpet. He wrinkles his nose; it stinks of cigarette smoke and cleaner. He notices the way Jarod carefully places the metallic brief case separate from

his other bags, tucked away out of sight. As though not to tempt him. But Will is inexplicably tempted by the thing. It whispers to him about secrets. He ignores it for now.

He can feel the returned weight of Jarod's eyes on him. Assessing, inquiring eyes searching for something. Will knows with terrifying clarity that to look at Jarod, to truly see. That could destroy him.

"I brought you some clothes before I picked you up. I had to guess your size so hopefully some fit." Jarod hands over the plastic bag, it crinkles loudly in the quiet "Go have a shower and change and I'll get some food ordered."

Will felt like snarking that the man wasn't his father but kept his mouth firmly shut. He looked through the bag Jarod hands him and picks out some clothes, ripping the tags off. He doesn't like the bathroom any more than the bedroom. There were some very questionable coppery stains on the floor and a splatter of mold in the sink. Still after a hot shower and a clean change of clothes he does feel a lot better. He finds Jarod laying on one of the beds with a laptop open in front of him, which he closes when Will approaches.

"We forgot my medication." Will says as he sits down on his bed facing the man.

Jarod does a double take "The medication that Davis has been giving you?"

"Yes. I need it. Those agents had some. But I forgot to grab it when you… rescued me." He looks at his hands "its going to be a problem. I don't know what they've been giving me so I don't know how we'll find some."

Jarod swings around to sit up. He sits still looking at him intently. The tiny hairs on the back of Wills neck stand on end under the scrutiny and fights the urge to flee. "What?" he asks when he can no longer hold out under the pressure.

"The drugs Davis gives you are dangerous. He uses them to cripple you not help you. You don't need them."

Will looks up sharply, there is a flash of anger bubbling under his skin "I *do* need them." He bares his teeth "I can't always control what happens without them. I could have killed my da on accident. I *won't* let that happen. So, we need to find something that will help me. Or I'm going back."

A knock at the door distracts them from the conversation momentarily. Jarod goes and pays, carrying the plastic bag of food back into their room.

Will comes over to see what it is. Burgers and fries. They eat in silence, a stalemate reached for the moment. Its comfort food, oil and salt and warmth.

After they have finished and everything is tidied back up Jarod sits down side by side with Will. Jarod eyes Will and sighs "I've worked as a doctor on a few occasions and I like to think I've got a good grasp on how to help you. But if you don't trust me then I understand if you want to go back to your uncles and aunts. But you should know that if a patient has an isolated seizure, they are not normally medicated right away. Not until a pattern is

established. You have had a single isolated incident where something unknown triggered a seizure. Finding your trigger is more important at the moment than medication."

Will looks ready to revolt but Jarod just holds up his hand "I understand that when you have a seizure, they are more dangerous to those around you than what other people experience. I also know what it is to be afraid of harming the people you love. But I don't think your dangerous."

Will folds his arms "You don't know shit."

Jarod continues on un-ruffled "Once isn't enough for Davis to justify the harm he could do to you with the chemical cocktail he's had his people cook up."

Will swallows "Better me than da."

Jarod swallows, and looks off into the distance, like he can see someone else in the room with them. "I barely know what it means to be a son let alone a father but I've often imagined what it would be like. I Imagin it would be very much what you just said 'better me than them', I'd do anything to protect them. I love my father and I'd die to protect him, but I know as a father he'd never forgive himself if I did. That it'd kill him anyway. A child should not die before their father. It's not how nature intended. How well can you see your da surviving your absence if something were to happen to you?"

Will feels wet in his eyes, and turns away quickly "I'm just going to the bathroom." He says after a moment and excuses himself.

Will shuts the door to the bathroom with relief. Because Jarod had some points. He knew his da best of anyone. He had looked into his da's eyes when he looked at him. If ever there was such a thing as ultimate love it was Ed Graham. The one sure way of destroying his da would be to destroy his son.

Will didn't want to hear any more words from Jarod though, he was a tiering man to be around. Even without truly looking at him Will could sense something else behind the man's eyes. Something vast and frightening. An intense reflection and a burning light, himself as an ant under a magnifying glass. All he could conclude was that Jarod was somehow seeing him. Truly seeing him.

He opened the bathroom window and was out without a second thought. He needed a break.

Jarod's eyes are still transfixed on a distant place. He lifts up his hand and looks at it palm up and open. Slowly he curls his fingers in until his hand is a fist, then he lets it drop beside him.

Blue Cove, Delaware

July 1997

Bella is mostly silent on the drive and Jack does not initiate conversation. He's too busy trying to find the words to tell this story. Where he should begin and end and what shouldn't be said. He anxiously fiddles his thumbs, tapping on the steering-wheel. After clinging to Bella for so long, he knows that this could be the point where he losses her too.

He clenches and unclenches his hands till they go white under strain, he will be laid bare by this. Bella will see him and the terrible choices he's made and the thought makes him feel valuable in a way he has not since he was a boy. He remembers the day that the car had left the road, he remembers the screeching rolling horror. His mom staring at him with wide eyes. He had thought then, that maybe she was not dead. He had thought people's eyes closed on death, that they were at peace. Instead, they were wide and fearful, glassy and hollow. He remembered crying out for her and someone approaching the car. The only image he had left in his head of her was of her in that moment.

Before Ed's mother had died, she'd written to Ed in strange cryptic language. 'In these utterances there be pain. In these words, darkness. This was the weight of ten thousand souls bearing down, crying out for vengeance.' Ed always just said she was mad and her words didn't mean anything. That she fancied herself a writer, but she had delusions of grandeur.

On that day in Blue Cove, though, those words had returned to him. When he had aimed and fired, motivated by rage. He had felt those words reverberating in his bones. Now he could only feel shame. The madness was in him, had walked with him since that day.

They barely graze the town itself and end up heading outward, away from the majority of the population. The town in small, smaller nowadays that it had been when he'd last been here. With the main employer gone it had all but died. A ghost town of abandoned homes which now belonged to the government. All of them seized as 'profits of a crime', a large majority of the owners long deceased.

He turned off onto the familiar side road. It's not so well maintained anymore which made it a little shaky to drive on forcing him to slow down. They stopped at the gate. There were two armed guards, but Jack just showed his ID and name-dropped Davis and they were let through.

They pulled up and parked in the large empty car park and for the first time Bella laid eyes on the sprawling buildings set slightly elevated overlooking the water front.

"Where are we?" Bella asks, for the most part it isn't anything spectacular. Its large but not out of place. But Jack knows she spotted the places where it is singed with black.

Jack unclicks his seatbelt and gets out "c'mon, I'll show you." He says and swallows down the instinct to turn away and leave.

They make their way up along the path, past a sign that is partly broken, the first few letters having fallen off into the grass leaving it reading "entre". The concrete is cracked in places and weeds were growing up through the cracks.

“It looks like some sort of fire?” Bella asks. “Did you rescue Will from a fire here?”

Jack nods but keeps walking in silence.

“Why was he here Jack?” she asks “This doesn’t look like a hospital or…” she’s searching. Jack knows she’s trying to create a story that makes sense.

“This is ‘The Centre’” Jack says grimly as they approach the entrance which has been cleared and cleaned and looks unscathed “It was a very powerful international corporation which had contracts with the departments of defense and justice as well as a slew of other private corporations and government departments. In its heyday it was secretly working behind the scenes to gain control of multiple governments across the globe.”

They went into the large entrance. Past an empty reception area were marble floors and walls and archers stretching off into the distance. It was mostly clean, a little dust littered the place, but it was obvious someone kept the place livable. Jack took in a deep breath “I haven’t been back here in years, but it looks the same.” He says looking over the visible damage on the walls and floors.

“Bullet holes.” Bella says knowingly.

They approach the lifts, half of which are cordoned off, mangled beyond repair. Further down she can see more obviously the charred remains of fire, though there are some large plastic sheets used to cover up the damage. Still the smell is unmistakable… burnt chemicals strong enough to induce a headache.

“For a long time, the Centre was under our government’s protection. Their services were invaluable and no one else could offer what they could. They were under close scrutiny, but no one could work out how they were managing to obtain the information or technology that they were. Not that infiltration to find out wasn’t attempted, countless CIA agents tried to infiltrate ‘the Centre’ but none ever made it out alive.”

Jack looks at Bella, though his eye contact is fleeting “We couldn’t risk an all-out takeover without risking the services we as a country had come to rely on. A takeover was a no go without proper intel.”

They stopped outside one of the lifts and Jack push’s the down button. “It goes up several more levels, as you’d expect.” Bella nods.

“But most of this place is hidden underground” he says then the bell chimes and the doors open, and they step in. Standing side by side Jack pushes the button for SL-25, the doors close, and they start their descent. “Twenty-six levels that are easy enough to get to and one level even deeper that was mostly obstructed last time I was here.”

Bella’s mind is on overdrive. He knows he can see it on her face. The dawning realization that whatever they are going to find down there is not something she will ever forget. She would finally know what it was that gave Jack nightmares. She thinks back to those nights of Jacks wide eyes when he wakes gasping, crying out.

“The government always wanted whatever they had that gave them the edge over all their competitors. But didn’t want to risk losing access to it. It seemed like an impossible impasse until one day Davis got a call from someone claiming to be on the inside. He called himself the informant.”

With a ding the doors opened into a pitch-black corridor. They stepped out and the lights fluttered to life down the length of a long corridor, a hum now present in the quiet.

“The informant helped orchestrate the fall of ‘The Centre’.” Jack says.

Bella had gone pale as they walked. Her eyes crossing from one side of the hall to the other. There were a lot more bullet holes in this part of the building. The fighting had been practically intense here. Jack turned towards some double doors. He punched a code into the keypad and they swung backwards automatically allowing them access.

Ahead of them were rows of cell doors. Each was made from heavy looking steal and had a long slit from which someone could look inside.

“A prison?” Bella asks and steps up to one of the doors to peer through the gap. She gasps and steps back again “Jack…. There are children’s drawings on the wall of this cell. There were children here?”

Jack nods “Many.”

Bella turns down the hall and sees door after door. They walk until they see another corridor also sporting two lines of endless cell doors. “Will was here?” She asks turning her wide eyes to Jack.

Jack nods.

“And the other children? What happened to them?” She asks.

“Most didn’t make it.” Jack replies “that day, the day of the raid when ‘The Centre’ realized they had no chance of winning or escaping with their… assets they.” Jack swallows, he’s got the shakes. He remembers that day. He remembers the screams and smell of smoke. He still has nightmares about the body’s he’d found down here. Tiny bodies, still warm, eyes wide and blank.

He has to separate himself to keep going, he lets himself go cold inside. “They decided to try and get away with a few choice assets and destroy anything” Jack shakes his head “*Anyone*. that they couldn’t take.” He says coldly. “Between the assets, the agents that we lost and their people, it was a bloodbath. Hundreds died that night.” He twists around and walks further down the hall. “There is a mass grave outside.” He adds and Bella trails behind.

“How could this be allowed to happen. Here, in our own country. We’re meant to be better than this.” She has a tremble in her voice.

“The informant never predicted the level of violence that ‘The Centre’ would stoop to. He doesn’t normally make mistakes this big. Partly it was bad luck. Bad timing. He didn’t know

that a group called ‘the Triumphant’ had arrived the day before. So, he never took this groups particular ruthlessness into account.”

Jack walks with purpose until he reaches another set of doors, he knows the codes for these as well and thy pass by them without a problem. Here the doors are more spread out. Jack approaches one and again has to enter a code to gain entrance.

The lights flickered on to reveal a large laboratory, the walls are lined with steal benches, intermittent with large machines that Jack can’t identify. There are several larger lab benches in the middle of the room. There are many stools splattered around the benches and lines of test tubes on shelves. An intense smell of cleaning chemicals fills the room, it’s been cleaned recently, and Jack feels sick.

“This Lab is still being used.” Bella comments.

“Come on.” Jack says and presses onwards through the lab to a set of double doors. He presses his thumb to a scanner and the doors open inwards to reveal a large echoey room.

They step inside to find rows of cylinder-shaped tanks. There are strange misshapen creatures floating in each one. Bella steps up to one and gasps. It could have been a human fetus, except for how mangled its chest is, large open skinless hollows that become more pronounced along its right side. The same side of its face looked like it had been bitten into by a large animal. She looks at the rows in horror. There are countless tanks. The further along she walks the more human the creatures look. Then at the end, there is a row of fully formed babies. She rests her hand on one of them, looking at the child withing. It's cold, frozen in time. The baby has hair on his head, his little hands are curled up to his chest. She feels a tickle on her cheeks and realizes that she is crying.

“The babies were never alive. Never born.” Jack says in a failed attempt to comfort his wife. His hand reaches for her to comfort, but she pulls away and continues on. Further along the baby’s turn to toddlers and these ones have the tell-tale signs of once being outside of these containers, these ones had lived. Scars riddle them.

“Not these ones.” Bella says her voice is so quiet that Jack can almost not hear it. She looks in at a little girl, she has scars over the majority of her body. “I’m so sorry.” Bella says and her tears flow more freely now. “Do these children have a name, or are they like Will was when you brought him to me? *Nameless*?” there at the end her voice rises as if to anger but then breaks and turns into a pained whisper.

He had been expecting anger and outrage, not this quiet, sad version of his wife. But of course, he was projecting. He realizes this grave mistake too late. He should have known better. But he had been blinded by his own muddled emotions. If they at behavioral sciences could only see him now.

He reaches for her again, but she just pushes his hands away “Bella,” he tries gently “We stopped them. Finished this, it has been over for years.”

“Do they have a names Jack? Did anyone give them names?” Bella weeps, shakes away another of Jacks attempts to comfort her and moves on. The oldest look to be on the cusp of

adulthood. He has black hair and open green eyes. He is so white he looks as though he could be made of paper.

“My understanding is that they gave each other names. Though there isn’t any record of them.” Jack says, knowing better than to reach out though he craves it with an intenseness he does not often feel. He keeps his hands stiffly at his sides, ready if she changes her mind and will let him comfort her.

“And their parents?” She asks, her eyes still locked on the boy in his circular coffin.

Jack sighs sharply “You already know the answer to that.”

“Do I? who’s genes did they use? Who’s eggs? Who’s sperm Jack? Don’t tell me they can make those too.” Her voice is growing in volume and Jack is thankful for her anger “None of this makes any sense, we don’t have this technology, and they were meant to have it twenty years ago?”

Jack nods at her “Like I said, we…. The government had to find out how they were doing it.”

Bella has a thoughtful look on her face as she looks back along the rows “I can see why. This is so far ahead of everyone else…”

Jack nods “They were a threat, but a very useful one.”

“Did the government know what they did here?” Her voice is soft again and she’s looking at Jacks face openly searching.

Jack looks away “Yes. Like I’ve already said. They had numerous contracts with many government departments.”

Bella keeps walking, further into the room, where the cylinders stop there are incubators. All are empty but it is clear they once held babies.

She clenches her hands to her chest as she looks down at one of the incubators. It has a sticker label on one side that is covering up a series of other stickers. It has a letter and number sequence on it. S2631

“We did this.” Bella moves along the rows, there are four rows of five. “What have we become?”

“This *wasn’t* us.” Jack is instant as he sweeps his hands around at their surroundings “We *stopped* this.”

Bella shakes her head “your still so naive sometimes.” She looks up at him “willfully so. Your no fool Jack Crawford, I suffer you willingly and I don’t suffer fools.”

Jack looks angry but manages to cool himself “I am telling you Bella, our government wouldn’t…”

Bella stops him with a single sharp look “Davis” she says.

Jack flinches back “He’s not what you think. He’s not what he seems. There are layers there that you can’t understand.”

“Can’t I?” she turns towards the next door and gestures for him to continue.

He opens this one and steps into another large room. This one in contrast is mostly empty. There is a large piece of glass that looks into another room. There are cylindrical tanks in here also, but they are wrecked. Bella approaches the glass with a frown and looks in. The sight is strange. There are massive black zig zagging lines sweeping out from a crack in the concrete on the roof. Lines of light and shadow burst from this, sweeping the entire room. All of the tanks are destroyed well beyond repair.

“This was the room the babies were made in. There was an accident when the last batch were being grown”

“What sort of an accident?” Bella asks curiously.

“We are still not entirely sure, but from what reports we have, it was a lightning strike.”

Bella looks at him with her eyebrows raised “We are on sub-level twenty-five.”

Jack nods “I know. I know how it sounds.”

“Impossible.” Bella says “but then all of this…”

Jack sighs “all of the babies were destroyed by the lightning strike. Except for one, the tank that took the brunt of the strike lived. We don’t know how or why or anything really. We aren’t in a place to understand…” Jack looks over at Bella and she looks back, there is a weight to this moment.

“That baby was… *is*….” Jack pauses at the edge of the name.

“Will.” Bella finishes for him.

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